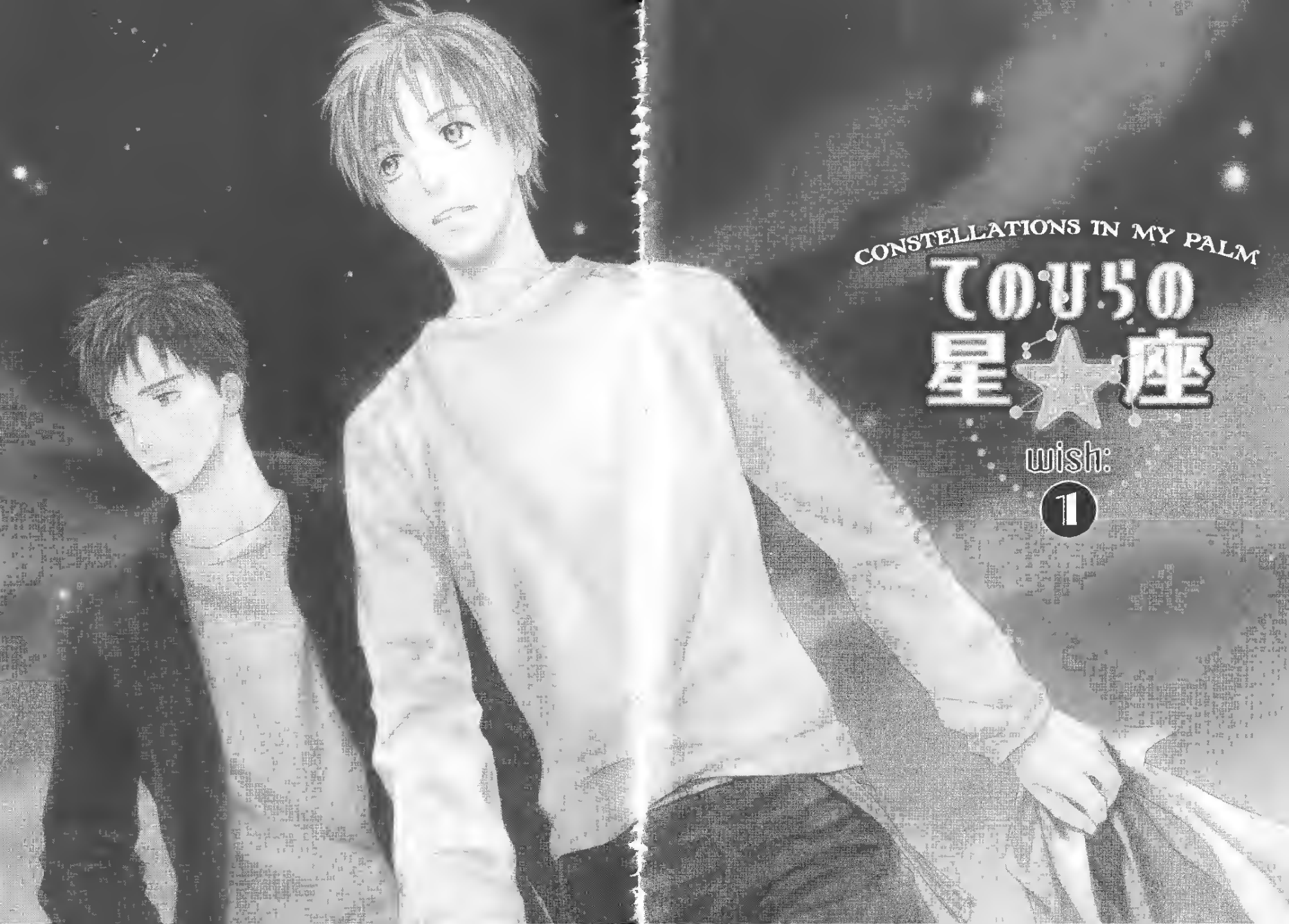
FLINCH
BIG BROTHER!
WHERE'RE YOU GOING?
OH...
UH...
BIG SISTER! BROTHER IS...!
TO TAKE WANSUKE FOR A WALK...


CONSTELLATIONS IN MY PALM
てのひらの星☆座
wish:
1

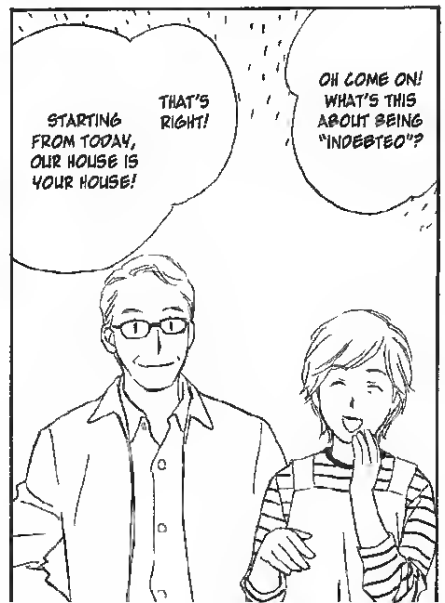
MNNPH
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
EN-CHAN WILL BE ARRIVING SOON.
LEGEGO!
BUT...
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR WANSUKE'S EVENING WALK...
AREN'T YOU HAPPY? YOU TWO USED TO BE SO CLOSE.
U...
I SWEAR, MIZUHO!
EVEN FOR OBON AND NEW YEAR'S, YOU USED CLUB ACTIVITIES AS AN EXCUSE TO AVOID VISITING THE MAIN FAMILY.
URGH...
BUT GRANDPA AND THE OTHERS ARE NICE SO THEY STILL GAVE YOU GIFT MONEY EVEN THOUGH YOU DIDN'T SHOW!
CLATTER
ガラリ
WOOF
WOOF
WOOF
B...

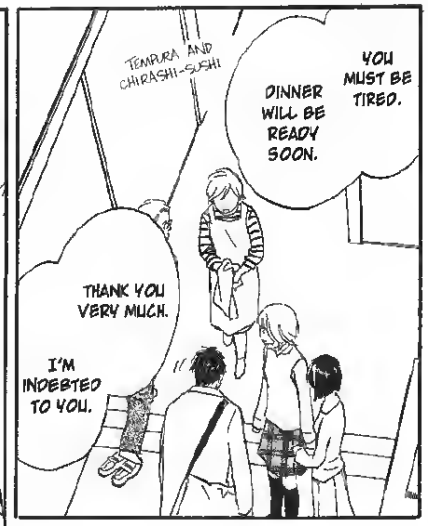
I'M SO HAPPY YOU'LL BE LIVING WITH US!
YOU'RE LOOKING WELL, NANOKA-CHAN, SUMIRE-CHAN.
CHATTER
CHATTER
STAY WITH US EVEN AFTER YOU GRADUATE, OKAY?
LET'S GO WALK WANSUKE TOGETHER, TOO!
OK
THE NAIVE-LOOKING...
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KID I USED TO KNOW WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN..
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, EN-CHAN!
CONGRATULATIONS ON GETTING INTO UNIVERSITY!
AND SEEING HIS FACE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SEVERAL YEARS WAS LIKE SEEING THE FACE OF A STRANGER.
...LONG TIME NO SEE.

OH!
WHAT'RE YOU GUYS DOING IN THE DOORWAY?
HEY.
WE'RE HOME-

MEOW-
HERE'S YOUR CUSHION, EN-CHAN!
YOUR TEA-
NYAAKO'S BEING FRIENDLY TO A MAN!
HUH? HOW UNUSUAL!
THANK YOU.
...I DUNNO...
IT'S LIKE HE'S ALREADY FAMILY
CRUNCH
OH, THAT'S RIGHT! YOUR THINGS ARRIVED EARLIER. I'VE PUT THEM IN YOUR ROOM.
HE'S LIKE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON...
MY SISTERS DON'T SEEM TO THINK ANYTHING OF IT SINCE THEY SEE HIM ONCE A YEAR WHEN THEY VISIT THE MAIN FAMILY, BUT...
...I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN SEVEN YEARS- I FEEL LIKE RIP VAN WINKLE.
HIS MATURE, CALM SMILE...
HIS HEIGHT, WHICH SURPASSES MINE...

SO IMPOLITE!
BROTHER, YOU'RE BEING TOO UNSOCIABLE!
THAT'S NOT TRUE
HIS EXPRESSION TOWARDS ME IS DIFFERENT FROM THE SMILE HE SHOWS THE OTHERS.
...YEAH.
HIS TONE...
I'M PROBABLY THE ONLY ONE THAT NOTICES..
IT'S THE COLD TONE OF A POLITE GUEST.
YOU GUYS!
EN-CHAN CAN'T GET IN THE HOUSE WITH YOU BLOCKING HIS WAY LIKE THAT!

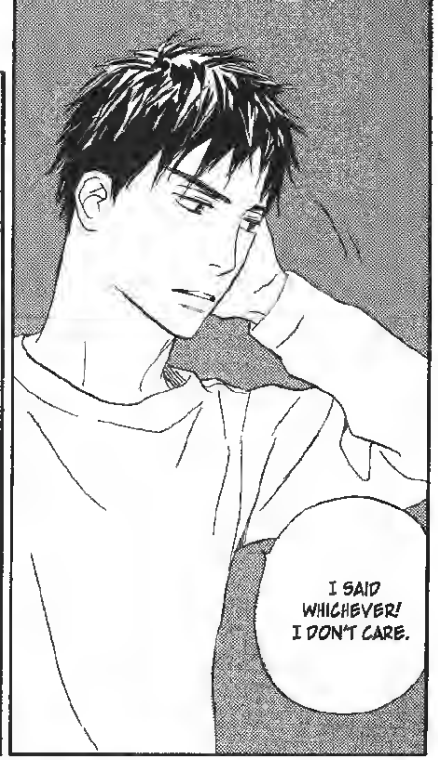

OH COME ON! WHAT'S THIS ABOUT BEING "INDEBTED"?
THAT'S RIGHT!
STARTING FROM TODAY, OUR HOUSE IS YOUR HOUSE!


TEMPURA AND CHIRASHI-SUSHI
YOU MUST BE TIRED.
DINNER WILL BE READY SOON.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
I'M INDEBTED TO YOU.

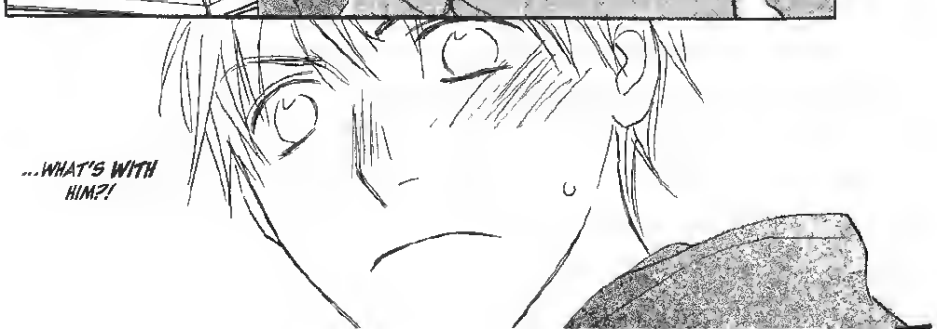
THE ROOM NEXT TO MINE—
THE 6-TATAMI-SIZE ROOM WHICH WE'D BEEN USING AS STORAGE UP UNTIL THEN...
IT'S OLD, BUT...
THIS'LL BE YOUR ROOM.
SHOW ENJI TO HIS ROOM.
SMACK
SO SHALL WE HELP YOU UNPACK UNTIL DINNERTIME?
URGH
OOH! I'LL HELP, I'LL HELP!
SO I'M THE ONE WHO HAS TO HELP HIM UNPACK...
WHAM!!
YOU TWO HELP ME WITH DINNER.
Boo...
CLICK
...WE LEFT THIS ROOM UNCHANGED, SINCE WE HAD NO PLANS TO USE IT BACK THEN
WHEN WE REMODELED THE HOUSE SEVERAL YEARS AGO...
WE CHANGED THE TATAMI MATS AND THE WALLPAPERS IN THE OTHER ROOMS, BUT...

SIGH...
IT'S NICE TO BE LIVING HERE.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I'M FILLED WITH GRATITUDE.
I'M SORRY TO CAUSE YOU SO MUCH TROUBLE.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? IT'S A PARENT'S PREROGATIVE TO TAKE CARE OF A CHILD.
THAT'S RIGHT. DON'T HESITATE TO ASK US IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU NEED.
THERE'S ONLY ONE YEAR'S DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU TWO COUSINS...
SO WHY IS HE SO MUCH MORE MATURE, I WONDER?
MAYBE IT'S THE WAY I WAS RAISED?
MUMBLE

RUSTLE
ガサ


I SAID WHICHEVER! I DON'T CARE.

THAT POLITENESS HE SHOWED BEFORE...
WHERE HAS IT ALL GONE...?
RIIIP


...WHAT'S WITH HIM?!

...WHICHEVER.

MY AUNT AND UNCLE IKEZOE DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND ENJI HAVING SUCH A ROOM...
AS LONG AS HE HAS A PLACE TO STAY ANYTHING IS FINE
ARE YOU SURE...?

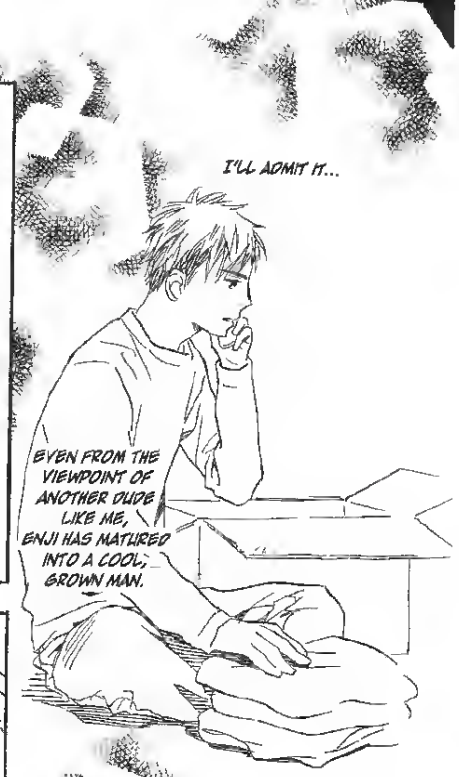
...BUT AT THE VERY LEAST, WE PUT IN SOME NEW CARPET...
AND PUT UP SOME NEW CURTAINS.
THUNK

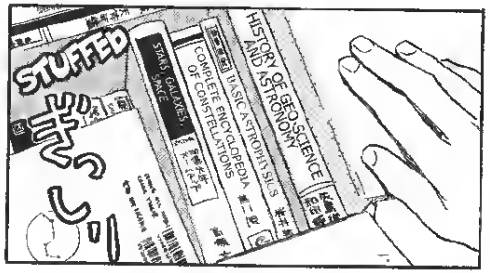
THIS WILL
...UM, SO— WHICH BOX SHALL WE OPEN FIRST?

HUH?

WHAT?
HE'S KINDA...
IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU NEED RIGHT AWAY, WE SHOULD-

HAS A BIT OF A COMPLEX
HE'S EVEN MANAGED TO GET ACCEPTED INTO THE ELITE UNIVERSITY I FAILED TO GET INTO LAST YEAR.
RIIIP
SO I GUESS IT'S NO WONDER THE LADIES WON'T LEAVE HIM ALONE.
..OH WELL, NOT THAT I CARE...


I'LL ADMIT IT...
EVEN FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ANOTHER DUDE LIKE ME, ENJI HAS MATURED INTO A COOL, GROWN MAN.


STUFFED
STAR GALAXIES
COMPLETE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CONSTELLATIONS
BASIC ASTRONOMY
HISTORY OF RED SCIENCE AND ASTRONOMY

HUH?
JUST HOW MANY BOOKS ON ASTRONOMY DOES HE HAVE?
SO I GUESS HE REALLY MERITED HIS ACCEPTANCE INTO UNIVERSITY, HUH?
WHAT A BOOKWORM...!

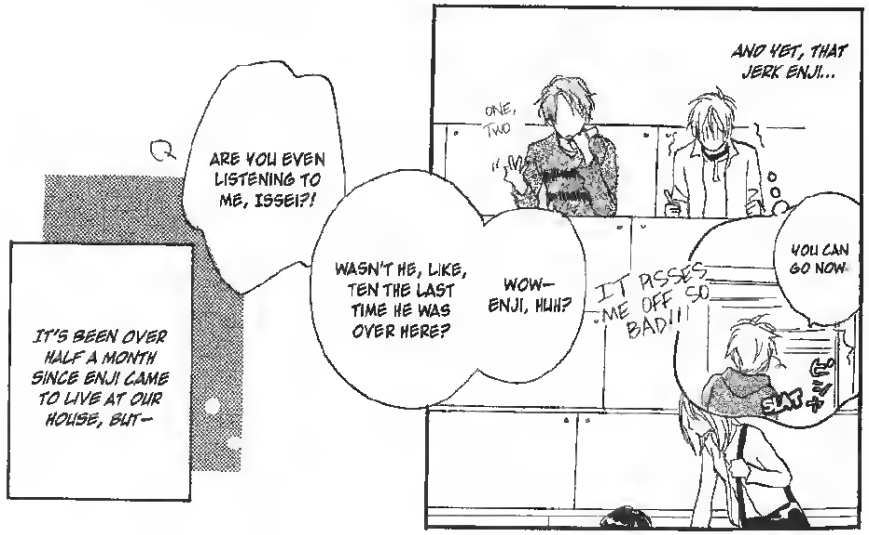
HMPH!
HE WAS ALWAYS TAGGING ALONG, CALLING, "MIZU-CHAN!~MIZU-CHAN!" WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
RIIIP

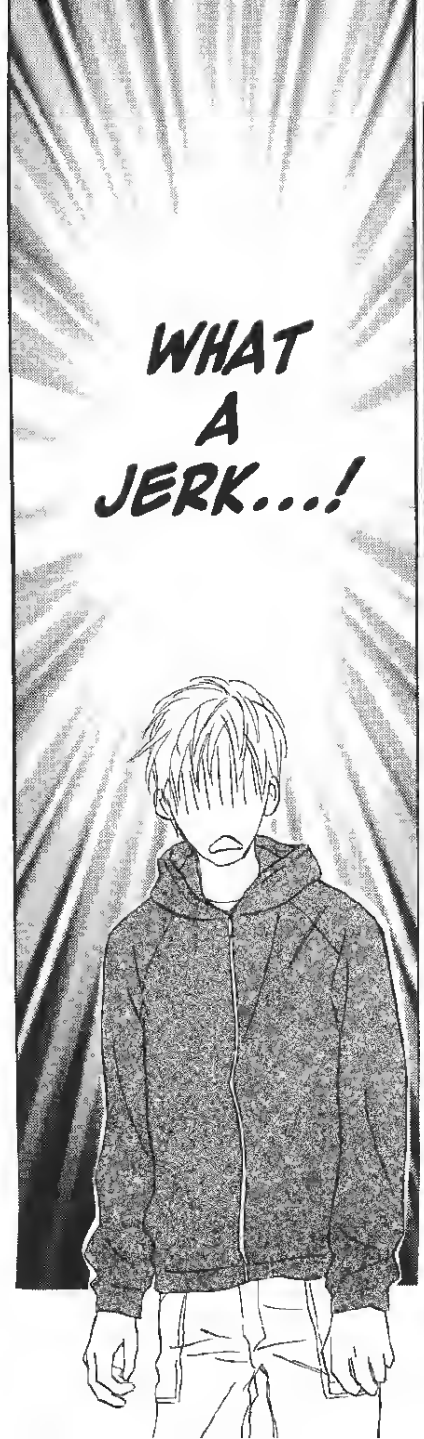
I THINK IT'S.
WHAT'S THIS SONG CALLED AGAIN?
THIS RINGTONE...
HELLO?
"WISH UPON A STAR."

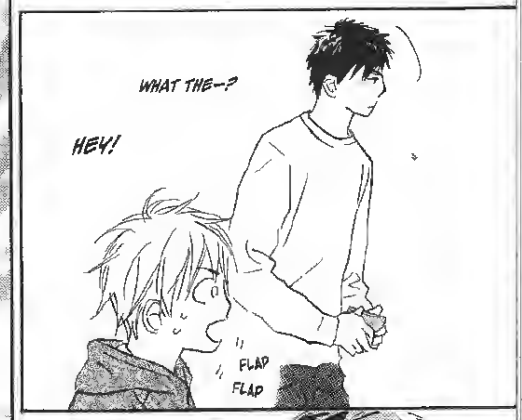
OH COME ON— A CALL FROM YOUR GIRLFRIEND ALREADY?
LISTEN TO HIM, SPEAKING ALL GENTLE...
YEAH, I JUST GOT HERE.
AND YOU, YOSHIMI-SAN?

WHA–
...
GRAB
DON'T TOUCH THAT!
IT LOOKS PRETTY ANCIENT–
SEEMS LIKE IT'S HANDMADE
CLICK
..WHAT AN OLD BOX.
LATER, THEN.
OKAY–

I MEAN, I HADN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG!
THAT'S RIGHT!
I ONLY TRIED TO REPLACE THE LID ON THE BOX BECAUSE IT WAS ASKEW!
...IS WHAT...
...YOU WANTED TO YELL AT HIM, HUH?


IT'S BEEN OVER HALF A MONTH SINCE ENJI CAME TO LIVE AT OUR HOUSE, BUT—
ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME, ISSEI?!
WASN'T HE, LIKE, TEN THE LAST TIME HE WAS OVER HERE?
WOW— ENJI, HUH?
AND YET, THAT JERK ENJI...
ONE, TWO
IT PISSES ME OFF SO BAD!!
YOU CAN GO NOW
SLAT


WHAT A JERK...!


WHAT THE—?
HEY!
FLAP FLAP

HUH?
WAI...
TOSS
YOU CAN GO NOW

SLAT
W..

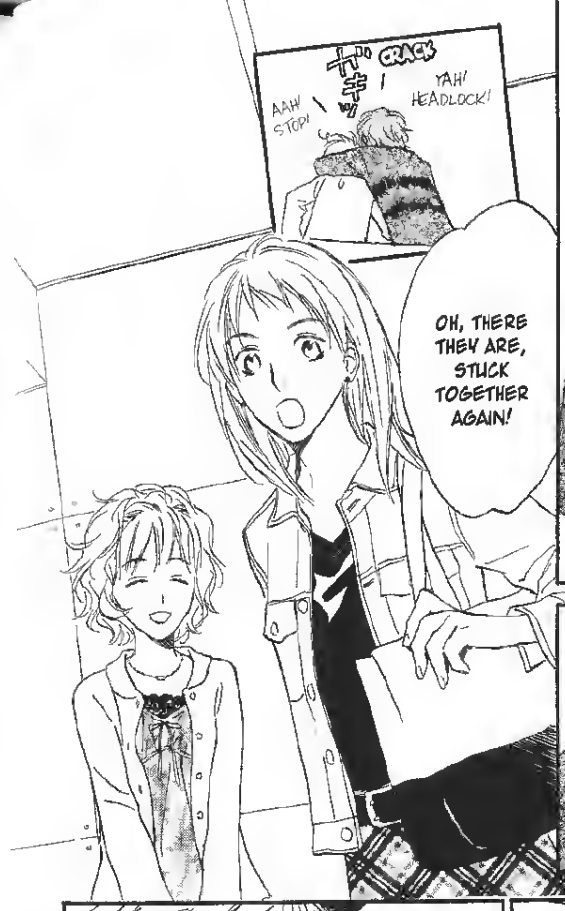
STUFF
...EVEN IF THAT'S TRUE—
IT'LL JUST BE AWKWARD TO DIG IT ALL UP AGAIN NOW...
CLIK CLIK
BUT YOU CAN'T BE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH HIM FOREVER.
I KNOW THAT.
...BUT...
WHEN HE TAKES THAT COLD ATTITUDE WITH ME...
I FIND IT HARD TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP.
SNAP
...WELL, I SUPPOSE THERE'S NO HURRY.
LRGH
THAT'S WHAT YOU SUSPECT, TOO... ISN'T IT, MIZUHO?
AND THAT'S WHY YOU FELT CONFLICTED ABOUT SEEING HIM AGAIN. RIGHT?
IF I COULD, I'D LIKE TO GO BACK TO THE WAY WE WERE, TOO.
HE WAS MY FAVORITE COUSIN AND BEST FRIEND.

I'VE BEEN WANTING TO COMPLAIN TO SOMEONE ABOUT IT ALL, BUT...
I RARELY GET TO TALK TO ISSEI SINCE HE'S SO BUSY WORKING PART-TIME TO EARN MONEY FOR A CAR.
KCHAK
OH, SORRY.
S...
...
THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US IS STILL THE SAME AS EVER
HE'S STILL COLD TOWARDS ME.
AND THOUGH HE SMILES AT EVERYONE ELSE—
I WAS TRYING TO BE ALL FRIENDLY AND EVERYTHING, SINCE WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO BE LIVING TOGETHER..
GRUDGE? BUT I...
OKAY THEN, MAYBE IT'S NOT EXACTLY A GRUDGE, BUT...
...MAYBE SOMETHING ABOUT THE PAST IS BOTHERING HIM?
WELL, YOU KNOW... MAYBE..
CLAK CLAK
...HE'S HOLDING A GRUDGE FROM THE PAST OR SOMETHING.
URK!

ぎゅう～
HUG-
WE DON'T "SEEM" LIKE AN ITEM...
WE ARE AN ITEM!

AWW SO COLD!
YOU'RE HEAVY
I KNOW HE DOESN'T FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT ME AT ALL.
HE JUST ENJOYS EVERYONE ELSE'S REACTION
USED TO IT
HE'S SO CRUEL!
ISN'T HE?
ISSEI YOSHIMURA IS PROBABLY THE MOST POPULAR GUY IN THE DEPARTMENT.
HE'S GOT GOOD LOOKS...
AND KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE WOMEN.

ISSEI'S ALWAYS SAYING, "I LIKE BOTH MEN AND WOMEN- WHICHEVER"
BUT I WONDER HOW SERIOUS HE IS WHEN HE SAYS IT..
SQUEAL!
I KNEW IT! IT'S TRUE, ISN'T IT?!
OOOOH, THANK YOU, ISSEI-KUN!


AAH! STOP!
YAH! HEADLOCK!
CRACK
OH, THERE THEY ARE, STUCK TOGETHER AGAIN!

THERE'S ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.
RIGHT?
THUMP

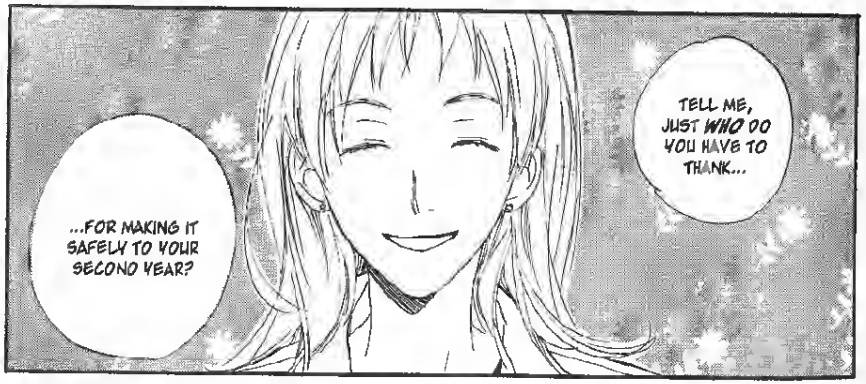
OOH, HE'S RECOVERED A LITTLE
I GUESS HE'S RIGHT.
YEAH.

HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAY IT?
.. I TOLD YOU.. I ONLY CHOSE ECONOMICS BECAUSE IT SEEMED THE EASIEST.
AND ISSEI JUST HAPPENED TO CHOOSE THE SAME.

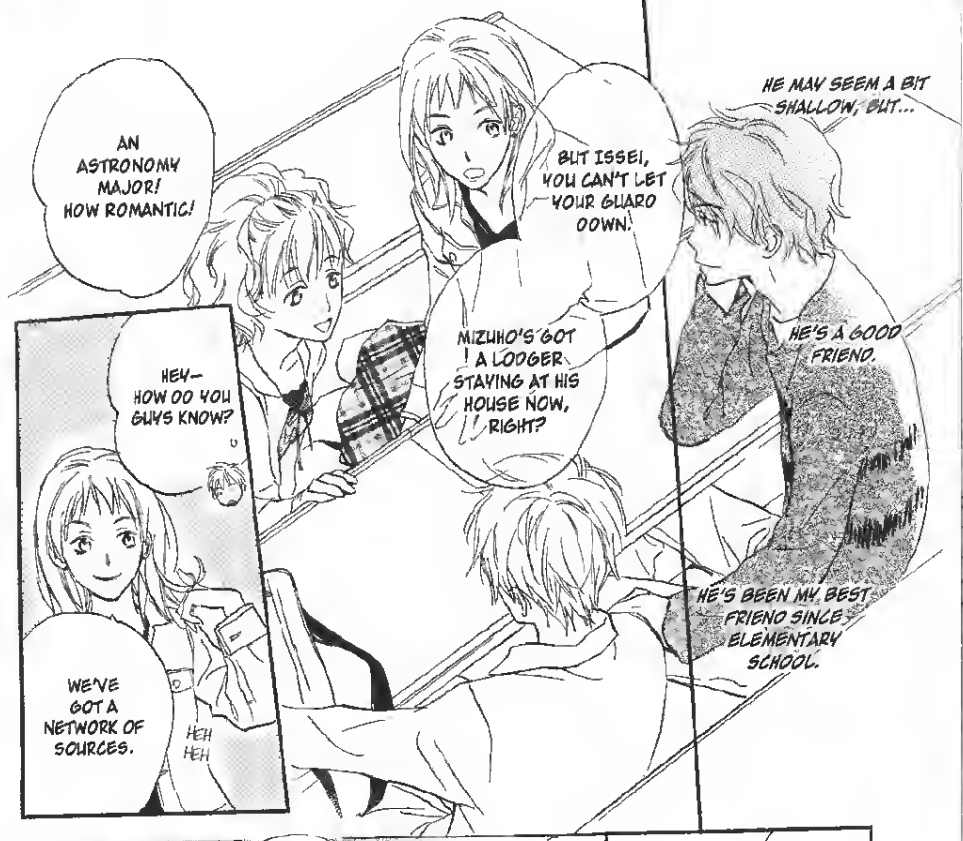
REALLY, YOU GUYS SEEM LIKE AN ITEM!
CHILDHOOD FRIENDS, GOING TO THE SAME SCHOOL.
AND TO TOP IT OFF, EVEN IN THE SAME DEPARTMENT, TOO!
WHAT, AGAIN?
SEE YA-

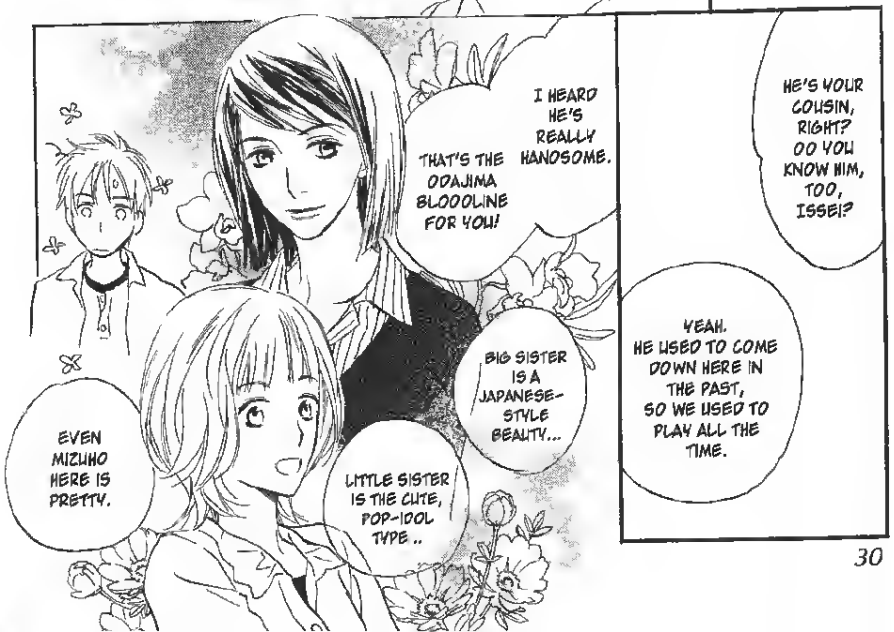
DON'T GET THE WRONG IDEA, ULALA, HIRO-CHAN.
NOT LISTENING AS USUAL
HEE HEE
THEY'RE SOOO SUSPICIOUS!

I'M NOT EVEN ABLE TO HOLD A PROPER CONVERSATION WITH HIM...
UH...
BUT...
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO INVITE HIM TO A MIXER...?
I KNOW THAT
WE'LL SET UP A GET-TOGETHER FOR DRINKS, SO BRING HIM DOWN FOR SURE.
WE JUST WANT TO MEET HIM.
FLATTERY WILL GET YOU NOWHERE.


...FOR MAKING IT SAFELY TO YOUR SECOND YEAR?
TELL ME, JUST WHO DO YOU HAVE TO THANK...

GOOD LUCK.
...
IT'S A PROMISE, THEN!
winner!
...MISS ULALA MORIGUCHI AND HER CLASS NOTES...


AN ASTRONOMY MAJOR! HOW ROMANTIC!
BUT ISSEI, YOU CAN'T LET YOUR GUARD DOWN!
HE MAY SEEM A BIT SHALLOW, BUT...
HEY- HOW DO YOU GUYS KNOW?
MIZUHO'S GOT A LODGER STAYING AT HIS HOUSE NOW, RIGHT?
HE'S A GOOD FRIEND.
WE'VE GOT A NETWORK OF SOURCES.
HEH HEH
HE'S BEEN MY BEST FRIEND SINCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.


I HEARD HE'S REALLY HANDSOME.
THAT'S THE ODAJIMA BLOODLINE FOR YOU!
HE'S YOUR COUSIN, RIGHT? DO YOU KNOW HIM, TOO, ISSEI?
YEAH. HE USED TO COME DOWN HERE IN THE PAST, SO WE USED TO PLAY ALL THE TIME.
BIG SISTER IS A JAPANESE-STYLE BEAUTY...
EVEN MIZUHO HERE IS PRETTY.
LITTLE SISTER IS THE CUTE, POP-IDOL TYPE ..

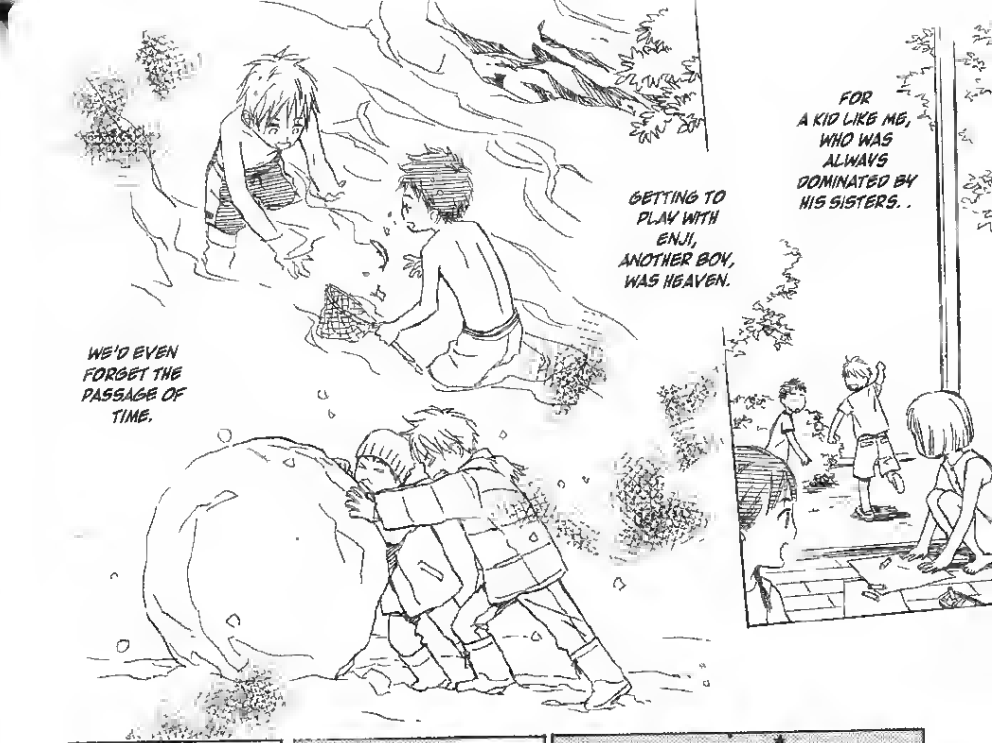
EVER SINCE THE DAY ENJI ARRIVED..
I HAVEN'T SET FOOT IN THIS ROOM.
...OKAY.
I BET I SEEM LIKE A SELFISH JERK TO HIM.
ONLY COMING TO SPEAK TO HIM WHEN I WANT SOMETHING..
COME IN.
I HAVEN'T EVEN SPOKEN ALONE WITH ENJI SINCE THEN.
SO WHAT DID YOU WANT TO TALK TO ME ABOUT?
CREAK
OH...
OH, RIGHT.
...UM...
YOU WANNA GO OUT FOR DRINKS SOMETIME NEXT WEEK?

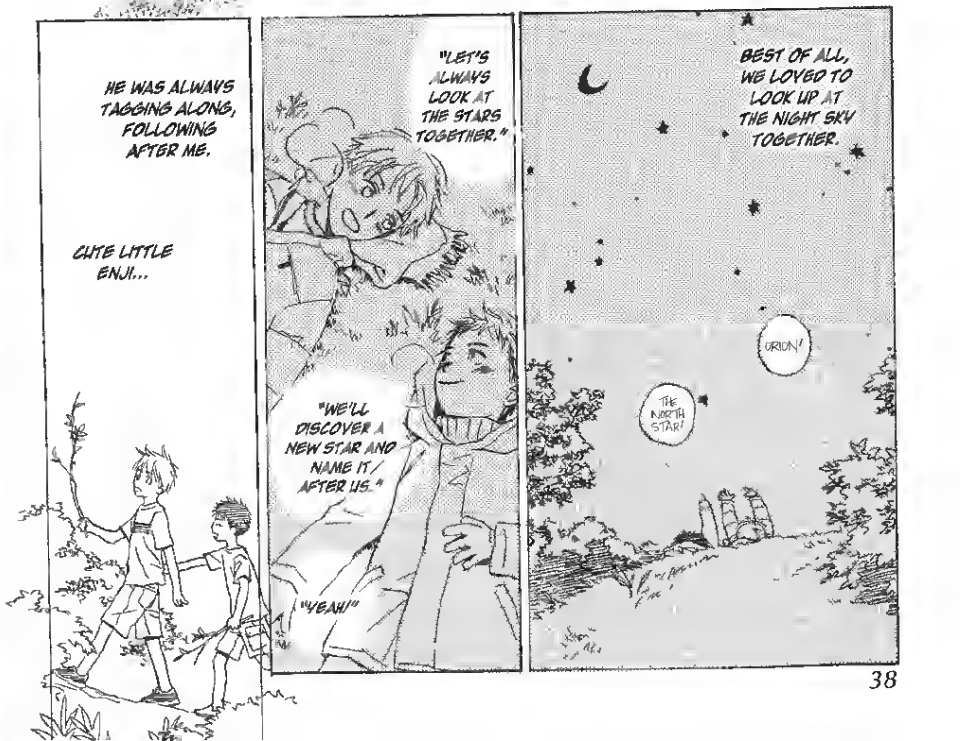
...KNOCK
KNOCK
ENJI—
CAN I TALK TO YOU?
HUH?
CLATTER
WHAT IS IT?
...UM...
ACTUALLY—
URK—

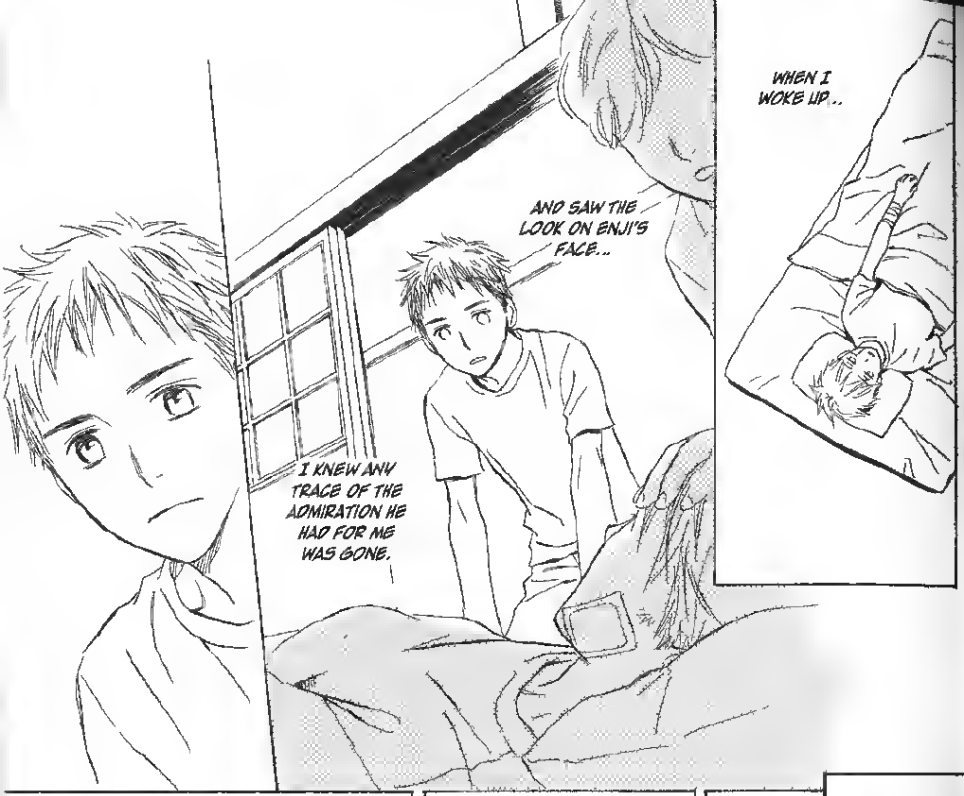
HUH?
SOME GIRLS IN MY CLASS ARE DYING TO MEET YOU.
THEY'LL BE SO HAPPY.
OH-
OH, GOOD
IS THAT AN "OK"?
HUH...?
HIS EXPRESSION...
...I'M NOT GOING.
GRIN
WITH ME
WOULD SOMEONE NORMALLY ASK SOMETHING SO OBVIOUS?
...WITH WHO?
I... WOULDN'T MIND.
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO...
OH, BUT--
IF I SAY HE DECLINED THE OFFER...
...I'M SURE ULALA AND THE OTHERS WILL GIVE UP

I KNOW THE REASON.
I KNOW WHY IT'S BECOME THIS WAY BETWEEN US.
IT'S JUST THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM IT IN SO MANY WORDS...
AT LEAST...
IT'S BEEN MY REASON FOR DISTANCING MYSELF FROM ENJI.
MIZU-CHAN...
...AND THAT'S WHERE I SPENT TIME WITH ENJI.
ON LONG VACATIONS, WE ALWAYS WENT TO VISIT MY MOTHER'S FAMILY'S HOUSE...
THUNK
...WHAT'S WITH HIM?
CREAK
WHY NOT?
...WHAT?
HEY—
I'VE GOT TO STUDY.
ENJI'S FEELINGS WERE EASY TO UNDERSTAND BACK WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
MAYBE HE'S HOLDING A GRUDGE FROM THE PAST OR SOMETHING.
...BUT THEY'RE A COMPLETE MYSTERY TO ME NOW.

BUT SOON, MY CLASSMATES GREW AND EVENTUALLY CAUGHT UP TO ME—
ENJI WAS SMALLER THAN MOST KIDS, AND HE LOOKED UP TO AND ADMIRED ME.
AT THE TIME, I WAS THE TALLEST BOY IN CLASS...
I WAS AWARE OF IT, AND PROUD TOO.
AND PRETTY NIMBLE, TOO.
EVEN BEGAN TO SURPASS ME..
IT WAS THE FIRST SUMMER OF JUNIOR HIGH.
BUT AT THE VERY LEAST, I STILL WANTED TO LOOK GOOD IN FRONT OF ENJI
AND THEN, THANKS TO MY CHILDISH DESIRE TO SAVE FACE...
IT HAPPENED—
WOOSH
OH—
HAVING BEEN OVERSHADOWED, I FELT PRETTY PARANOID.
A BIG CRAWFISH!!
LOOK!

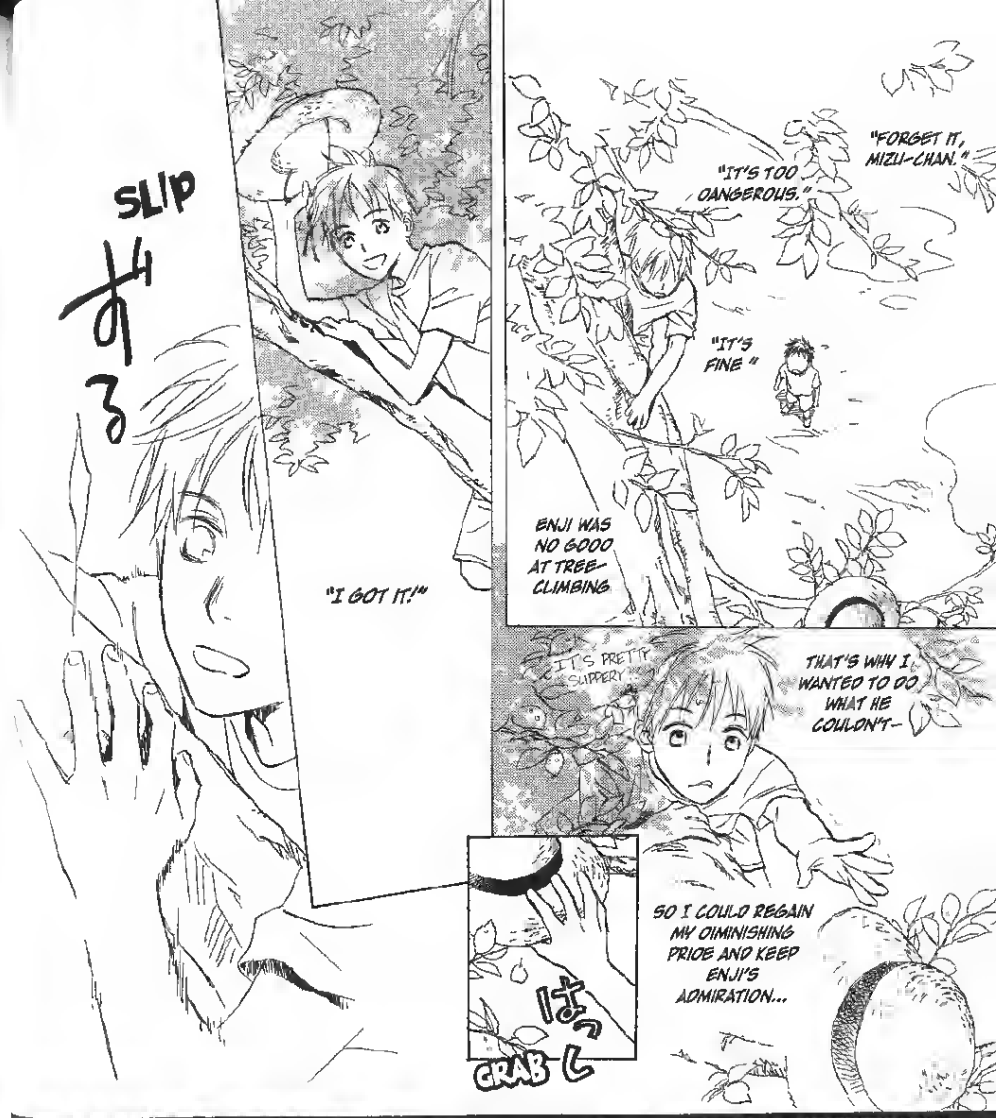

FOR A KID LIKE ME, WHO WAS ALWAYS DOMINATED BY HIS SISTERS. .
GETTING TO PLAY WITH ENJI, ANOTHER BOY, WAS HEAVEN.
WE'D EVEN FORGET THE PASSAGE OF TIME.

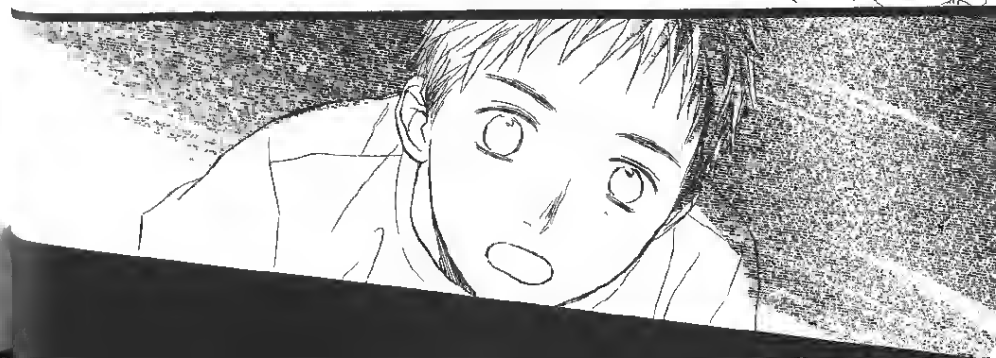

HE WAS ALWAYS TAGGING ALONG, FOLLOWING AFTER ME.
CUTE LITTLE ENJI...
"LET'S ALWAYS LOOK AT THE STARS TOGETHER."
"WE'LL DISCOVER A NEW STAR AND NAME IT / AFTER US."
"YEAH!"
BEST OF ALL, WE LOVED TO LOOK UP AT THE NIGHT SKY TOGETHER.
ORION!
THE NORTH STAR!


WHEN I WOKE UP..
AND SAW THE LOOK ON ENJI'S FACE..
I KNEW ANY TRACE OF THE ADMIRATION HE HAD FOR ME WAS GONE.

THE REALIZATION WAS SO HEARTBREAKING--
AND SO EMBARRASSING--
AND BECAUSE AT THE TIME I WAS MIRED IN A MORASS OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS...
I BEGAN TO AVOID ENJI.

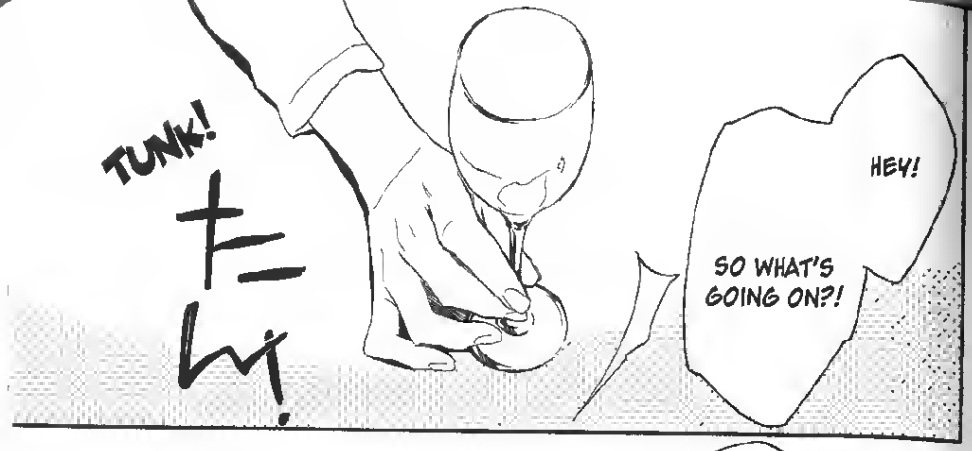
I SOMEHOW SENSED
"HERE YOU GO, SUMIRE-CHAN."
THAT HIS CHANGE CAME FROM HIS DISILLUSIONMENT WITH ME.
AFTER THAT, THERE WAS A KIND OF AWKWARDNESS BETWEEN US...
"OH, I'LL..."
"IT'S OK-- I CAN DO IT MYSELF."
"THANK YOU!"

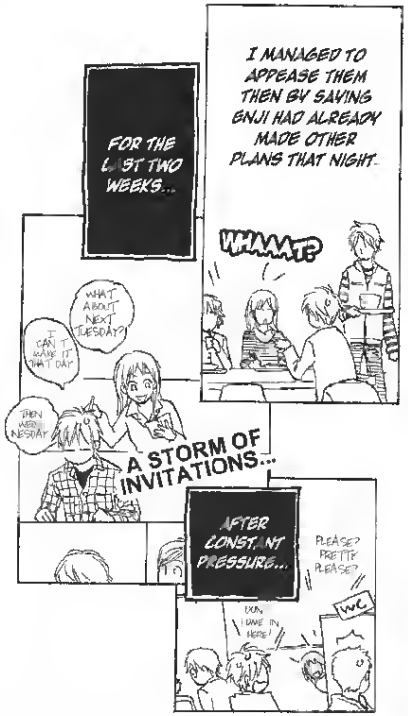

SLIP
すべる
"I GOT IT!"
"FORGET IT, MIZU-CHAN."
"IT'S TOO DANGEROUS."
"IT'S FINE."
ENJI WAS NO GOOD AT TREE-CLIMBING
IT'S PRETTY SLIPPERY
THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO DO WHAT HE COULDN'T--
GRAB
はっ
SO I COULD REGAIN MY DIMINISHING PRIDE AND KEEP ENJI'S ADMIRATION...

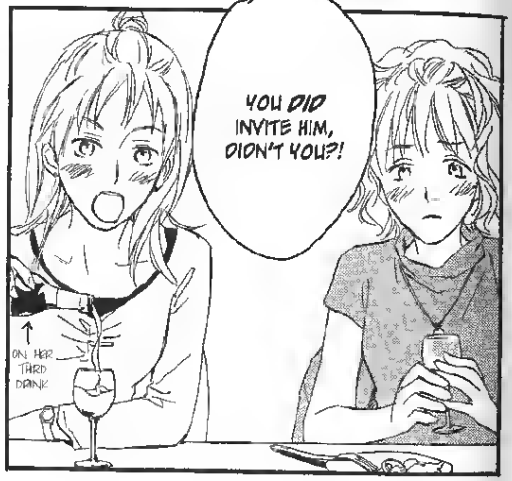


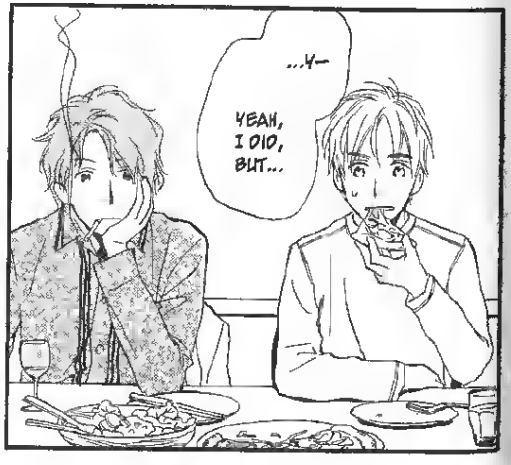
CLATTER
LOOKING AT THE STARS LIKE THIS...
...SOMEHOW CALMS MY SOUL.
MAYBE ALL I HAVE TO DO IS APOLOGIZE, BUT-
FRANKLY, AT THIS POINT... THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
OH NO.. I'M GETTING DEPRESSED AGAIN...
WHAT HAS CHANGED IS-
"LET'S FIND STARS TOGETHER."
THAT MUCH HASN'T CHANGED.

AND SO, BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION...
EVENTUALLY, HE STOPPED ALTOGETHER
MID-SUMMER GREETING HOW ARE YOU? ARE YOU COMING TO COME?
AFTER THAT, HE MADE A FEW ATTEMPTS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH ME, BUT...
IT'S A PHONE CALL FROM EN-CHAN.
I'M LATE FOR MY MEETING WITH ISSEI
BYE
I STOPPED GOING TO THEM.
THE VACATIONS WE'D PROMISED TO ALWAYS SPEND TOGETHER-
I SEVERED ALL TIES WITH ENJI.
I WAS TERRIBLY FLUSTERED WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS:
ENJI HAD GOTTEN INTO THE UNIVERSITY OVER HERE AND IT WAS DECIDED THAT HE WAS GOING TO COME LIVE WITH US.
THAT'S GOT TO BE WHY HE'S SO IMPERSONAL TOWARDS ME.
I'M SURE ENJI MUST STILL BE DISGUSTED WITH ME BECAUSE OF THE CHILDISH ATTITUDE I HAD BACK THEN.


TUNK!
HEY!
SO WHAT'S GOING ON?!


FOR THE LAST TWO WEEKS...
I MANAGED TO APPEASE THEM THEN BY SAYING ENJI HAD ALREADY MADE OTHER PLANS THAT NIGHT.
WHAAA.T?
WHAT ABOUT NEXT TUESDAY?
I CAN'T MAKE IT THAT DAY.
THEN WEDNESDAY?
A STORM OF INVITATIONS...
AFTER CONSTANT PRESSURE...
PLEASE? PRETTY PLEASE?
WC
DON'T COME IN HERE!
BUT HAVING BEEN TURNED DOWN ONCE ALREADY...
I COULDN'T ACTUALLY WORK UP THE COURAGE TO ASK HIM DIRECTLY...
...I GAVE IN.

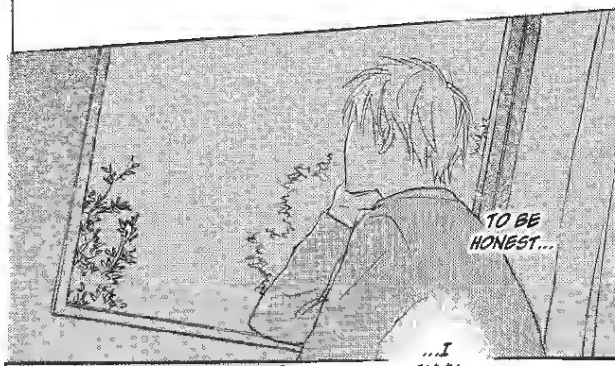

YOU DID INVITE HIM, DIDN'T YOU?!
ON HER THIRD DRINK


...Y-
YEAH, I DID, BUT...

THE DREAMS WE SOWED TOGETHER BACK THEN AS WE GAZED AT THE STARS...
ARE GROWING WITHIN HIS HEART...

BUT ENJI HAS KEPT HIS DREAMS...
AND IS GETTING CLOSER TO REALIZING THEM EVERY DAY.
...THAT I'VE CHOSEN, NOT TO STUDY THE STARS BUT-
INSTEAD, THE PATH OF AN ORDINARY BUSINESSMAN.

UNLIKE ME, WHO'D GIVEN UP ON THOSE DREAMS SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE...


TO BE HONEST...

...I ENVY HIM.

WOW, LOOK HOW YOU'VE GROWN!
...ENJI?
REMEMBER ME? I'M ISSEI YOSHIMURA!
WE MET AS KIDS.
...
...
OH- YOUR HAIR'S DIFFERENT
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.
OH-
NICE TO MEET YOU, I'M ENJI IKEZOE.
SQUEAL
SQUEAL
SIT HERE!
OH THANK YOU
WHAT WILL YOU HAVE TO EAT ENJI-KUN?
HE'S EVEN MORE HANDSOME THAN I'D HEARD!
...
...
OH MY GOD...

NO! I'M NOT LEAVING UNTIL I'VE SEEN ENJI-KUN!
WHY DON'T WE CALL IT A NIGHT...?
WE CAN JUST TRY AGAIN ANOTHER TIME.
...BUT I DOUBT HE'LL EVER SHOW UP.
SO I WROTE A MEMO WITH THE TIME AND PLACE, AND STUCK IT IN HIS DOOR THAT MORNING.
THAT'S RIGHT! WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR SO LONG!
WHAT, AREN'T MIZUHO AND I ENOUGH FOR YOU?
I'M BORED OF LOOKING AT YOU GUYS
YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY HOTTIES!
OH MY
SORRY I'M LATE.
LET'S SEE NOW
HOW SHALL I TALK THEM OUT OF THIS...?

I'M SURE HE'S NOT TAKING THIS STUPID JOKE SERIOUSLY.
BUT IT MAKES ME LOOK SO LAME...
...
...
I SEE.

HE DOESN'T LOOK AT ME AT ALL.
I'M POSITIVE HE DIDN'T COME HERE BECAUSE HE WANTED TO...
...SO I WONDER WHY HE CAME...?
...BUT HE WAS SPEAKING ON THE PHONE THAT ONE TIME TO WHAT WAS PROBABLY HIS GIRLFRIEND.
BECAUSE HE WAS INTERESTED IN MEETING THE GIRLS?
...AND HE DOESN'T SEEM THE TYPE TO STRAY.
TO HELP ME SAVE FACE.
NO NO NO WAY

NO WONDER THE GIRLS ARE GA-GA OVER HIM.
MUMBLE
SO WHAT WAS THE BIG DEAL?
HE SEEMS LIKE A PERFECTLY PLEASANT GUY.
HIS TACTFUL SMILE--
HIS CALM, COOL ATTITUDE--
HIS KIND WORDS--

MUMBLE
BUT THAT'S...
...BECAUSE HE'S TALKING TO SOMEONE OTHER THAN ME.

OHHH, LOOK!
AT IT AGAIN!
DID YOU SEE?
THEY'RE ALWAYS FLIRTING WITH EACH OTHER DURING CLASS, YOU KNOW.
MIZUHO AND ISSEI-KUN ARE A LOVEY-DOVEY COUPLE!

EVEN AS HIS COUSIN, DON'T YOU THINK THEY'RE SUSPICIOUS?
IGNORING ME?!
WHO ARE YOU CALLING "SUSPICIOUS"?!

IT'S NO WONDER MIZUHO CAN'T GET A GIRLFRIEND.
IT'S NOT THAT HE CAN'T; HE DOESN'T WANT TO.
YOU GUYS NEVER TIRE OF GOSSIP DO YOU?
GET AWAY ISSEI!

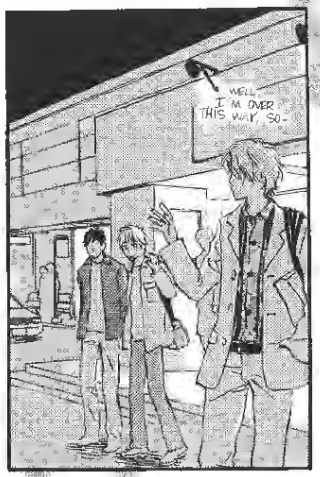
PLOD
SO HE IS ANGRY WITH ME AFTER ALL...
AND I GUESS HE HAS NO PLANS TO SEE THE GIRLS EVER AGAIN, EITHER.
SORRY, I DON'T HAVE A CELL PHONE, SO...
REALLY?
FRESH OUT OF POLITENESS AND TACT, HUH?

WELL, G'NIGHT...
LATER
CLATTER...
WHIMPER
I'M HOME

I WONDER WHAT THE DEAL IS...?

PLOD
PLOD
PLOD
...THANKS FOR SHOWING UP TONIGHT.

I WISH WE COULD'VE TALKED LONGER
ME TOO!


WELL, I'M OVER THIS WAY, SO-

...STARS—
NOTHING IN YOUR ROOM IS ASSOCIATED WITH STARS...
DOES HE MEAN TO SAY SOMETHING TO ME...?
...IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
THAT WAS JUST A CHILDHOOD DREAM.
WEREN'T YOU GOING TO BE AN ASTRONOMER?
WHAT?

WHA...
CAN I COME TO YOUR ROOM?
THUNK
WHAT...
DOES HE WANT?

IT WAS SO EMBARRASSING, HAVING TO CALL AN AMBULANCE AND EVERYTHING.
THAT GUY, HE'S ALWAYS SO—
HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SO OVER-THE-TOP.
HA HA HA
HA
...
...
OH, I SEE...
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS LIKE A FOOL.
SO WHAT IF WE WERE?
MRGH
...YOU TWO SEEMED PRETTY FRIENDLY.
I GUESS HE DIDN'T WANT TO PATCH THINGS UP AFTER ALL...

COULD IT BE...
OH...
...MAYBE HE WANTS TO GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE, TOO...?
HEY—
DO YOU REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN YOU, ISSEI, AND I WENT TO THE PLANETARIUM TOGETHER, AS KIDS?
AND THERE WAS A BIG FUSS BECAUSE ISSEI'S NECK GOT ALL CRAMPED UP—
MAYBE THAT'S WHY HE SHOWED UP TONIGHT.
MAYBE HE'S ONLY ACTING GRUMPIER THAN USUAL TO HIDE HIS EMBARRASSMENT...

SADNESS...
JEALOUSY...
IRRITATION...
EVERYTHING'S ALL SO JUMBLED UP—
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING—
WE'RE TOTALLY CLOSE.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ULALA SAY SO?
WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER SINCE WE WERE KIDS...
AND HE'S MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN ANYONE—
M
A
B
WH—
WHAT—
...
...

...WHAT...?
I LOVE YOU.
wish: 1 END

★ THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THIS BOOK IN HAND. I AM HONAMI. DURING MY WORK ON THIS PROJECT, I STARTED TO SPEND A LOT MORE TIME LOOKING UP AT THE STARS. THE CLEAR NIGHTS WHEN THE STARS ARE CLEARLY VISIBLE ARE BEAUTIFUL, OF COURSE, BUT THE SLIGHTLY OVERCAST NIGHTS ARE NICE, TOO, WHEN THE MOON CAN BE SEEN AS A DIM BLUR BEHIND A VEIL OF CLOUDS. OBVIOUSLY, THE CONSTELLATIONS NOTED IN BOOKS CAN BE FOUND UP IN THE SKY, BUT ACTUALLY SEEING THEM WITH MY OWN EYES IS SOMEHOW AWE-INSPIRING. I'M SURE MIZUHO AND ENJI MUST KNOW A LOT ABOUT THEM, AND I BET THEY'RE ABLE TO POINT THEM ALL OUT IN THE SKY.

★ WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THE PEOPLE WHO NAMED THE CONSTELLATIONS SURE HAD SOME GREAT IMAGINATIONS. BEING ABLE TO SEE ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS AND THINGS UP THERE IN THE INFINITE MASS OF STARS. SOMETIMES I WONDER, "HOW DID THEY EVER SEE THAT ANIMAL IN THIS COMBINATION OF STARS?!" FOR SOME OF THE CONSTELLATIONS I HAVE TO ASK, "DO YOU REALLY THINK SO ?" AND WITH OTHERS, I HAVE TO OUTRIGHT LAUGH- LIKE "THE SCULPTOR'S WORKSHOP" AND "THE TRIANGLE" (IT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT IS!) THE NIGHT SKY BECOMES FUN WHEN YOU'RE ABLE TO SPOT THE CONSTELLATIONS.

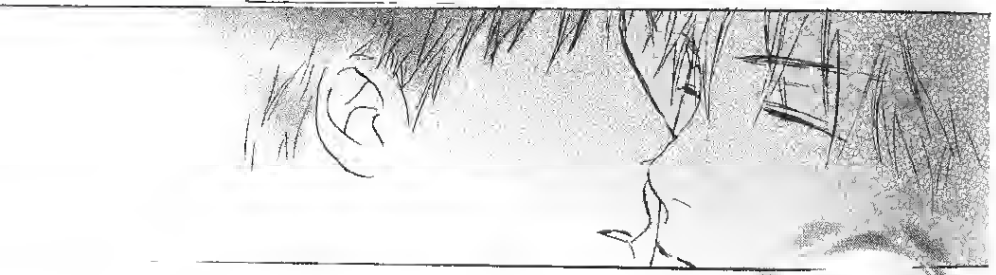
★ SAKURAGI SENSEI, THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I'M SORRY I WAS INADEQUATE IN SO MANY WAYS...! THIS STORY FEATURED QUITE A FEW GIRLS AND IT ADDED A "FLOWERINESS" (I THINK?) THAT MADE IT FUN. APOLOGIES ARE ALSO DUE TO MY EDITOR M-SAMA... I AM DEEPLY THANKFUL TO YOU. AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, IF YOU READERS ENJOY THIS BOOK EVEN A LITTLE, IT WOULD MAKE ME VERY HAPPY.

YUKINE HONAMI

SPLASH
+1"
7"

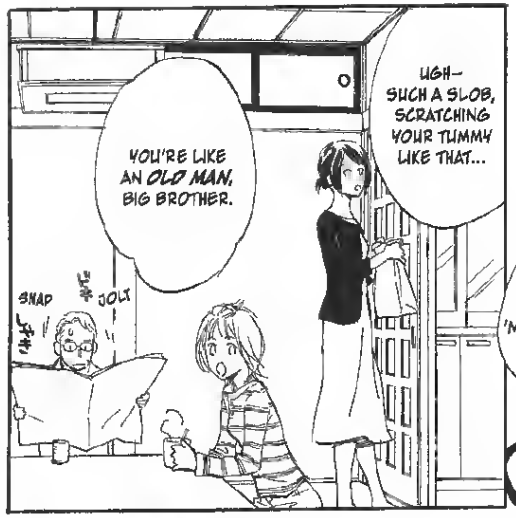
IT'S TEN YEARS TOO EARLY FOR YOU TO BE SPOUTING A LINE LIKE THAT!
OH, PLEASE!
YEAH, YEAH.
I JUST CAN'T WIN

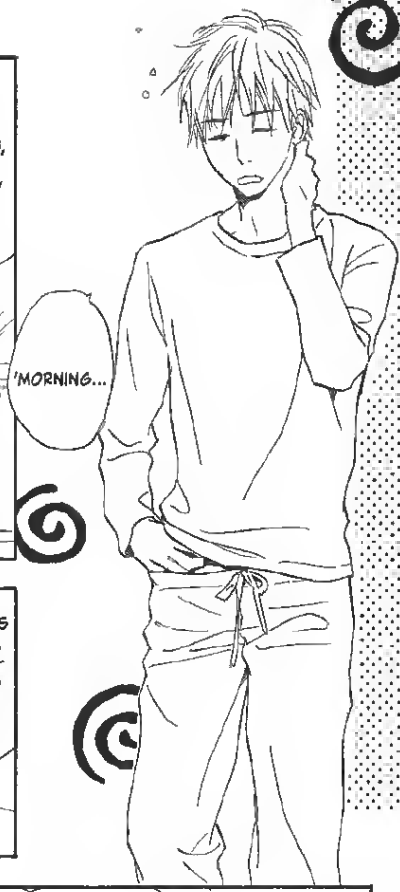
THERE'S A REASON...
FOR MY LACK OF SLEEP

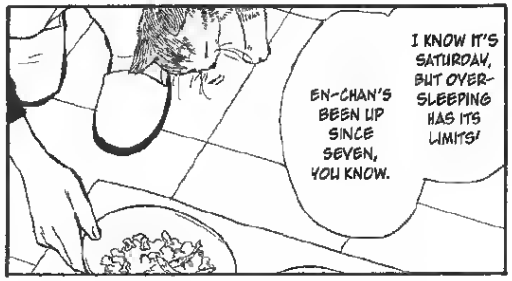


IT'S BEEN ONE WEEK SINCE THAT SUDDEN KISS-
...
...

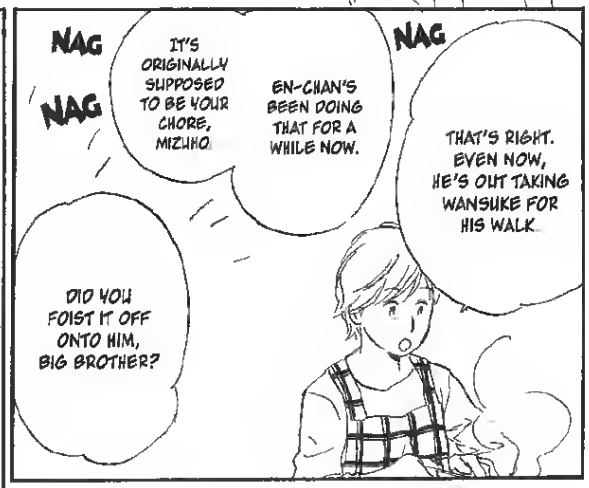
I LOVE YOU-


YOU'RE LIKE AN OLD MAN, BIG BROTHER.
UGH- SUCH A SLOB, SCRATCHING YOUR TUMMY LIKE THAT...
SNAP
JOLT


'MORNING...


EN-CHAN'S BEEN UP SINCE SEVEN, YOU KNOW.
I KNOW IT'S SATURDAY, BUT OVER-SLEEPING HAS ITS LIMITS!

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT
...I HAVEN'T BEEN SLEEPING WELL.


NAG
NAG
NAG
IT'S ORIGINALLY SUPPOSED TO BE YOUR CHORE, MIZUHO.
EN-CHAN'S BEEN DOING THAT FOR A WHILE NOW.
THAT'S RIGHT. EVEN NOW, HE'S OUT TAKING WANSUKE FOR HIS WALK.
DID YOU FOIST IT OFF ONTO HIM, BIG BROTHER?

I MEAN, ENJI SEEMS TO HAVE A GIRLFRIEND...
...BESIDES, WE'RE BOTH GUYS.
AND EVEN IF IT WERE TRUE THAT HE LOVES ME...
THEN HOW WOULD HE EXPLAIN HIS COLD BEHAVIOR?

BUT ENJI ACTED AS IF NOTHING HAD EVER HAPPENED.
MAYBE... HE DOESN'T REMEMBER?

FEELING SLIGHTLY LET DOWN EVEN AS I FELT A SENSE OF RELIEF...
DECIDED I'D RGET IT EVER APPENED AS WELL.

YET, THE NEXT MORNING...
I HAD NO IDEA HOW TO FACE HIM.

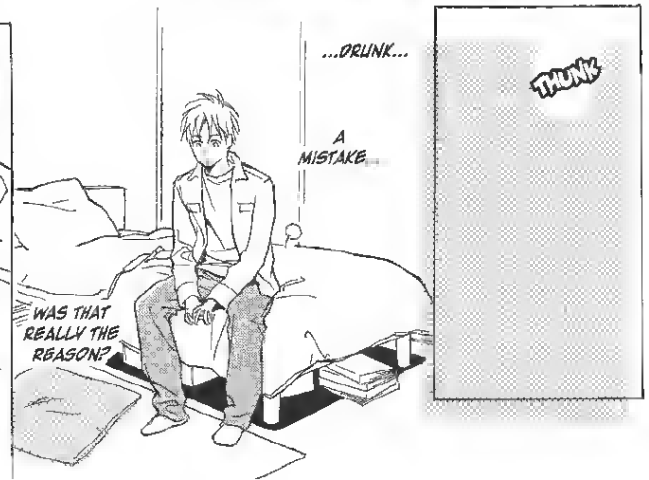
...HE MUST BE RIGHT.
HE WAS DRUNK, SO HE MADE A MISTAKE.

HMPH

AT THE TIME–
I WAS SO STARTLED THAT I COULDN'T REACT.
...
...

..SORRY– I'M DRUNK.
I'VE MADE A MISTAKE.

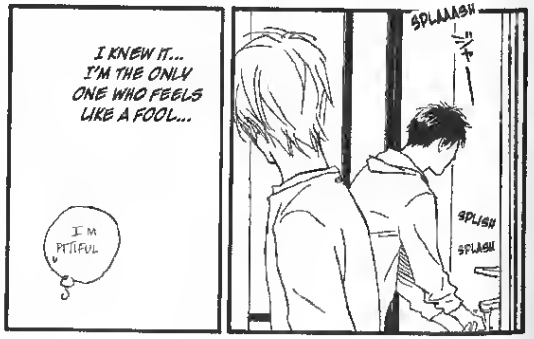
BUT EVEN IF IT WASN'T...
...HE WOULD NEVER DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT.


...DRUNK...
A MISTAKE.
THUNK
WAS THAT REALLY THE REASON?

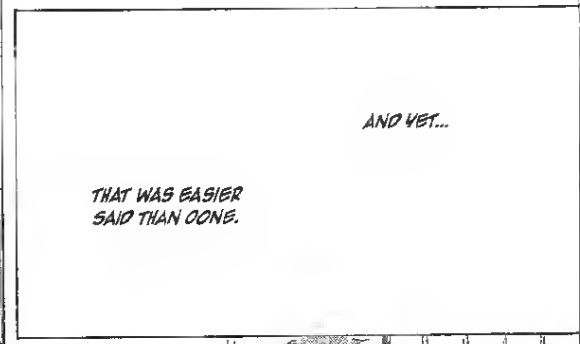
SOMEONE LIKE ME HAS NO RIGHT TO BLAME ENJI.
...OOPS.

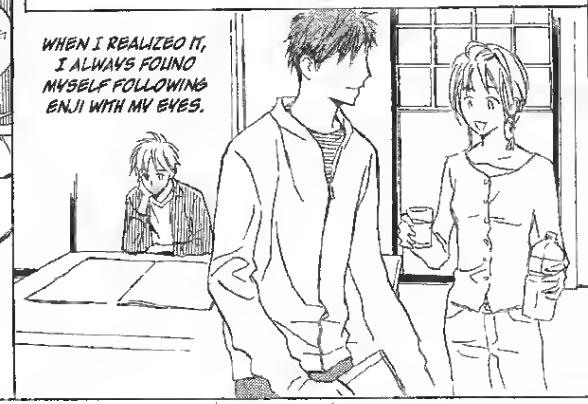
I'M SORRY, EN-CHAN...
MAKING YOU TAKE THE DOG OUT FOR A WALK EVERY MORNING..
IT'S OKAY. I LIKE DOGS.

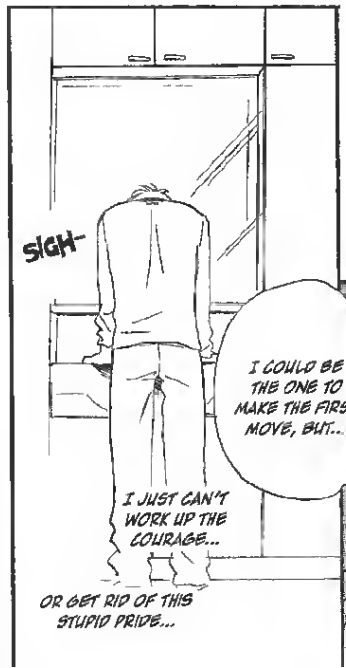
GOOD MORNING
...Y-
YOU'RE BACK.

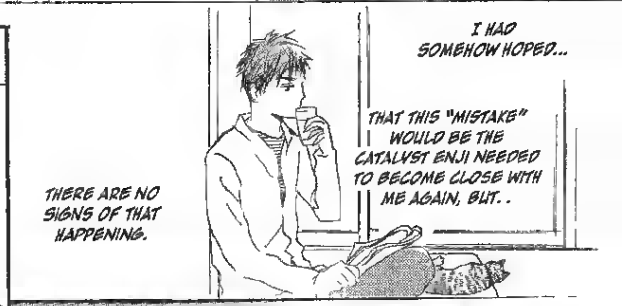

I KNEW IT... I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS LIKE A FOOL...
I'M PITIFUL
SPLAAASH
SPLISH
SPLASH

EVEN THOUGH HE PAYS ME NO ATTENTION WHATSOEVER...
WHAT AM I LOOKING AT HIM FOR?
THE DISTANCE WHICH HAD ORIGINALLY SEPARATED US..
SEEMED TO WIDEN EVEN FURTHER IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION.


AND YET...
THAT WAS EASIER SAID THAN DONE.


WHEN I REALIZED IT, I ALWAYS FOUND MYSELF FOLLOWING ENJI WITH MY EYES.


SIGH-
I JUST CAN'T WORK UP THE COURAGE...
OR GET RID OF THIS STUPID PRIDE...
I COULD BE THE ONE TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE, BUT..

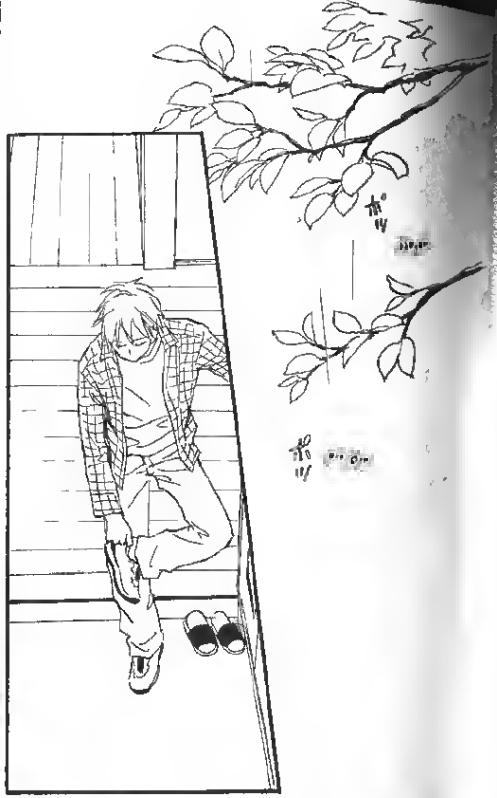

I HAD SOMEHOW HOPED...
THAT THIS "MISTAKE" WOULD BE THE CATALYST ENJI NEEDED TO BECOME CLOSE WITH ME AGAIN, BUT..
THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF THAT HAPPENING.

THINKING THAT PERHAPS HE WANTED TO RETURN TO THE WAY WE WERE IN THE PAST...
I GUESS THAT WAS JUST ALL IN MY IMAGINATION

EN-CHAN~
IT'S YOUR GIRLFRIEND, ISN'T IT~?
OH MY!
HO-HOH!
NO~
AN ACQUAINTANCE OF MINE FROM BACK HOME HAS MOVED DOWN HERE...
...AND HAS ASKED TO BE GUIDED AROUND TOWN.
THEN WHY DON'T YOU BOTH COME HERE TOMORROW NIGHT?
WE COULD ALL HAVE DINNER TOGETHER
PING
OH, HE COULDN'T DO THAT.
HUH? WHAT?!
NO WAY~!
MEOW!
JOLT
SO THAT REALLY IS HIS GIRLFRIEND?
IS SHE OLDER?
WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS SHE?
BA-THUMP
IS IT THAT "YOSHIMI" PERSON...?
NO, NO... IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT.
BA-THUMP
THEN BY ALL MEANS, BRING HER DOWN HERE!
HAVE YOU ALREADY INTRODUCED HER TO YOUR PARENTS?

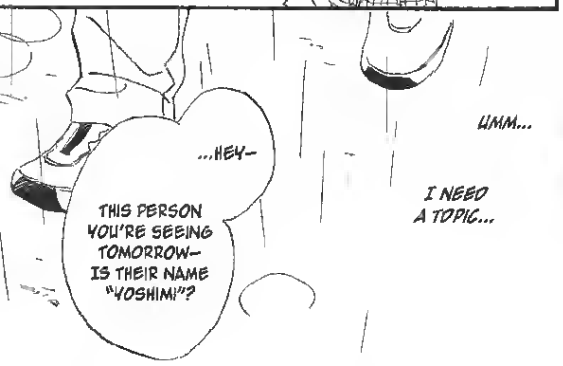
NYAAKO COME OVER TO DAD ONCE IN AWHILE TOO
PURR PURR
SO ATTACHED TO ENJI ALREADY...
STUPID NYAAKO...
MEOW~
OH?
YES, I LIKE CATS, TOO.
HUH?
AM I JEALOUS OF A CAT?
HEY, HEY, EN-CHAN.
DO YOU LIKE PAELLA?
SURE.
STIR STIR
OH~ SORRY!
I DON'T NEED DINNER TOMORROW.
WHAAAT?
OH? DO YOU HAVE TO GO TO WORK TOMORROW?
YUP.
ME AND SIS ARE MAKING PAELLA FOR DINNER TOMORROW!
I HOPE YOU LOOK FORWARD TO IT.

PATTER
PATTER
OH-



.. GOING TO WORK?
YEAH.

SILENCE
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO HERE...?


...HEY-
THIS PERSON YOU'RE SEEING TOMORROW- IS THEIR NAME "YOSHIMI"?
UMM...
I NEED A TOPIC...

(ENDED UP LEAVING TOGETHER)
PLOD
PLOD

THERE'S NOTHING STRANGE ABOUT THAT.
ENJI'S ALREADY 18.
BUT...
I FEEL SORT OF RESENTFUL THAT HE'S REACHED ADULTHOOD BEFORE I HAVE...
...AND A LITTLE EMBARRASSED TOO, HAVING KNOWN HIM IN CHILDHOOD...

...
...
AND...
WHAT IS THIS OTHER FEELING I'M HAVING...?
IT'S ALMOST AS IF...

LATELY, I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND MYSELF.

I'M DONE EATING!
OH! N... NOTHING
WHAT'S WRONG, MIZUHO?

...?

I DON'T WANT YOU TWO TO MEET.
PANG
YOU SHOULD BRING HER OVER TOMORROW.
I DON'T WANT TO.
...WHY NOT?
...
...
HOW DO YOU KNOW...?
AS IF...
WE'D RETURNED TO THE PAST...
SHE'S YOUR GIRLFRIEND, RIGHT?
I FELT LIKE I SAW HIS OLD SELF.
OH...
OH YEAH.
BACK WHEN WE WERE UNPACKING YOUR STUFF.
YOU HAD THAT PHONE CALL.
OH—
THAT EXPRESSION AGAIN—
HUH?
UH...
...
OH COME ON...
DON'T BE SO STINGY.
WHAT...?
I SHOULDN'T SAY ANYMORE—
YOU GUYS MUST BE REALLY LOVEY-DOVEY.
IS SHE THAT PRECIOUS TO YOU?
STOP—
I FEEL LIKE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US IS SHRINKING A LITTLE..
NO.
OH, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SO EMBARRASSED.
MAYBE IT'S JUST MY IMAGINATION AGAIN, BUT...

KCHAK
...UH-OH
WELL, AREN'T YOU LOOKING GLUM.
STAY AND WATCH IT WITH ME.
I JUST STARTED WATCHING A MOVIE I RENTED YESTERDAY.
...
OH, THANKS!
YOUR MOM'S ARE THE BEST!
MY MOM MADE SOME SEAWEED WRAPS, SO I BROUGHT YOU SOME.
THAT, AND THE GAME I BORROWED
THEN HERE—
OUT. ON A DAY-TRIP TO THE HOT SPRINGS WITH MY DAD.
WHERE'S YOUR MOM?
SHAAA...
I TOLD YOU, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!
...
...
G...!
SPLOSH

...BUT NOW, IT'S TOTALLY DIFFERENT.
IN THE PAST, I USED TO KNOW ENJI INSIDE AND OUT.
I CAN'T REALLY EXPLAIN IT, BUT—
IT'S NO WONDER, SINCE WE WERE INSEPARABLE.
I WONDER IF EIGHT YEARS OF SEPARATION...
...CAN EVEN MAKE A COMPLETE STRANGER OUT OF A CLOSE COUSIN?
I DON'T THINK HE'S PARTICULARLY STUCK ON THE FACT THAT YOU GUYS ARE COUSINS.
HUH?
EEEN—
CHUNK

WHAT'S WRONG?
TUNK
YOU LOOK DOWN... SERIOUSLY
WHY...?
WHY DID I HAVE TO SAY THAT TO HIM?
SIGH—
I COULD TELL THAT ENJI DIDN'T LIKE IT, AND YET—
...I HAD A LITTLE FIGHT WITH ENJI.
SO? IN ORDER TO HAVE A FIGHT, THE TWO OF YOU WOULD HAVE HAD TO BECOME CLOSE AGAIN.
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
SOMETHING WAS BOTHERING ME ABOUT HIM—
WE'RE JUST NOT IN SYNC ANYMORE.
NOT ANYTHING...
OUR WORDS, OUR FEELINGS...

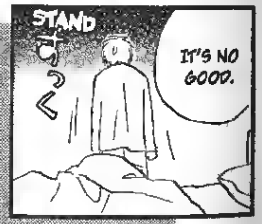
HAHA
IT'S JUST MY OPINION.
DON'T TAKE IT SO SERIOUSLY.
...
...
...THANKS.
SORRY FOR WORRYING YOU...
YOU'RE WELCOME.
GIAH! FOR REAL?!
GET READY FOR FOUR IN A ROW!
OKAY, VIDEO TIME!

...FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, OF COURSE.
ENJI'S LIKE SOMEONE WHO SUDDENLY MOVED AWAY OVERSEAS, ISN'T HE?
...HUH?
...HEY, I'VE BEEN THINKING—
GRRRK
IT'S LIKE, THERE ARE THINGS HE WANTS TO SAY, BUT...
HE'S FRETTING BECAUSE HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS HIMSELF— YOU KNOW?
THAT'S WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO ME.

ALL I FEEL IS A RENEWED SENSE OF THE DISTANCE CREATED BETWEEN US.
BUT NOW—

OOPS
OH—

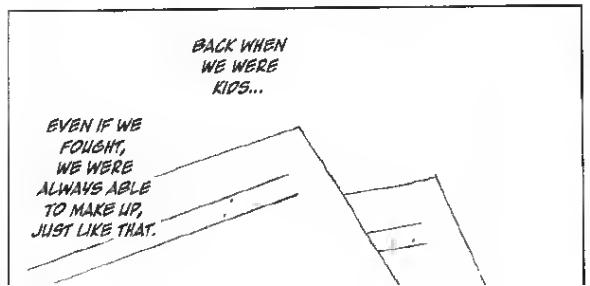
...
...
ROLL

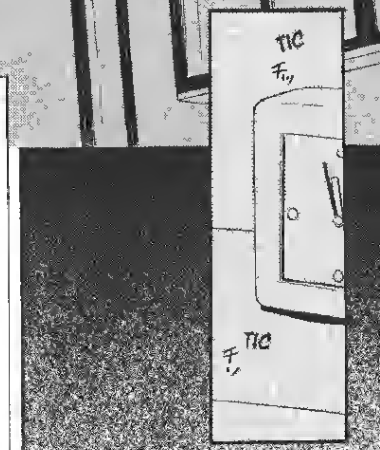

STAND
IT'S NO GOOD.

AT TIMES LIKE THIS—
THE BEST THING TO DO IS TO LOOK UP AT THE NIGHT SKY.

OH
...WELCOME HOME.
I'M BACK.
I'M BACK.
...AND HE STILL SEEMED ANGRY.
ENJI DIDN'T COME HOME UNTIL NIGHT TIME—

WELCOME HOME—
YES, THANK YOU
DO YOU WANT DINNER RIGHT AWAY? I'LL WARM IT UP FOR YOU


BACK WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
EVEN IF WE FOUGHT, WE WERE ALWAYS ABLE TO MAKE UP, JUST LIKE THAT.


TIC
TIC

...SIGH—
—I CAN'T SLEEP.

WHAT...?
DID HE JUST SAY, "I'M SORRY."?
JUST NOW—
ENJI?
APOLOGIZING...?
...
I WAS WRONG, TOO...
...OH ...UH, NO, NO—
I APOLO-GIZE
I WAS ..
...JUST A LITTLE ON EDGE.
... ...
ENJI'S LIKE SOMEONE WHO SUDDENLY MOVED AWAY OVERSEAS, ISN'T HE?
I GUESS HE DOES SEEM LIKE THAT...
...OH...

WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?!
...SHOULD I TURN BACK?
NO— IF I LEAVE NOW, WE'LL ONLY ALIENATE EACH OTHER EVEN MORE.
..YO.
ENJI!
!
TURN
...I'M SORRY ABOUT TODAY.
I GUESS IT'S NOT GONNA WORK
YIKES...

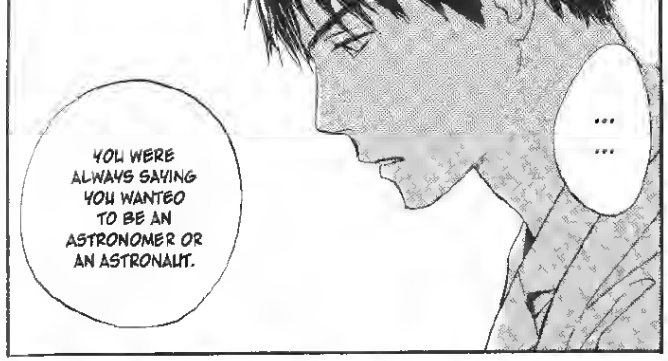
WE GOT SO CAUGHT UP IN THE STARS...
...THAT BY THE TIME WE GOT BACK, THERE WAS A HUGE RUCKUS BECAUSE THEY'D FOUND WE WERE MISSING.
THERE WAS EVEN THAT TIME WE SNUCK OUT AT NIGHT TO GO TO THE FIELD.
WE STARGAZED TOGETHER A LOT, DIDN'T WE?
...YEAH.
MY MOM STILL GRUMBLES AT ME ABOUT THAT, TO THIS DAY.
HA HA HA
SORRY ABOUT THAT...
BUT WE SAW AN AMAZING SHOOTING STAR THAT NIGHT. REMEMBER?
IT'S ALMOST STRANGE...
HOW NATURALLY I'M ABLE TO SPEAK WITH ENJI NOW.
...THERE SEEMS TO BE A WARMTH IN ENJI'S EXPRESSION NOW, TOO.
IT GOT TURNED INTO A PARK LAST YEAR.
AND EVEN THOUGH HIS WORDS ARE FEW...
THAT FIELD— IS IT STILL THE SAME AS EVER?
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M BEING MY NATURAL SELF—

...
...
AFTER TALKING MYSELF INTO IT, I FELT STRANGELY CALMER—
...THE STARS—
YOU CAN'T REALLY SEE THEM CLEARLY FROM HERE, CAN YOU?
CAN YOU STILL SEE STARS CLEARLY OUT WHERE YOU LIVE?
LIKE ORION AND VEGA—
AND I WAS ABLE TO TALK AS I NORMALLY DO.
AGAIN—
I KNOW IT MAY JUST BE MY IMAGIN-ATION...
BUT...
MY HEART IS WANTING TO BELIEVE THAT THIS IS ENJI'S WAY OF GETTING CLOSER TO ME.
WHO CARES IF I'M WRONG—?
THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IS THAT I'LL JUST GO BACK TO FEELING DEPRESSED AGAIN.

...IT'S GETTING COLD.
WHAT IF RAKING UP THE PAST...
CAUSES ENJI'S WARMING HEART TO FREEZE UP WITH ANGER AND RESENTMENT AGAIN...?
THE FACT IS, I AM NO LONGER ENJI'S HERO...
...AND I'VE IGNORED HIM FOR SEVEN YEARS.
I SHOULD PROBABLY TALK TO HIM HONESTLY ABOUT IT AND APOLOGIZE, BUT...
GUESS WE SHOULD HEAD BACK.
...AT ANY RATE...
I'LL JUST HAVE TO DO WHAT I CAN FOR NOW.
HEY...
WHY'D YOU GIVE UP THE STARS?

I WONDER... IF THIS IS ALSO THE POWER OF THE STARS?
AND FOR SOME REASON, THIS MAKES ME SO HAPPY...
SPENDING TIME TOGETHER WITH ENJI LIKE THIS...
IT'S WHAT I TRULY LOVE...
I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT THERE'S AN ACHE IN MY HEART...
IT'S ALMOST AS IF WE'VE RETURNED TO THE PAST...
AND I'M SURROUNDED BY A TENDER WARMTH.
...BUT EVEN IN THIS GENTLE CALM...
I FEEL THE HESITATION IN MY CORE.

SEEMING LIKE IT COULD SUCK EVERYTHING UP INTO IT—
THE STARS THAT GLITTER IN THE DEEP, BLACK SKY—
THE MOON—
THE INFINITE SPRAWL OF SPACE—
NATURE'S PLANETARIUM—
BUT I STILL LOVE THE STARS, EVEN NOW.
I LOOK UP AT THEM AT LEAST ONCE A DAY.
...MAYBE NEXT TIME I'LL COME TO YOUR PLACE.


YOU WERE ALWAYS SAYING YOU WANTED TO BE AN ASTRONOMER OR AN ASTRONAUT.
...
...

WHAT...?

IMPOSSIBLE?

OH... WELL...
YEAH, BUT...
IT'S JUST IMPOSSIBLE.

YEAH.
I MEAN, IT'S SO HARD.
I ACKNOWLEDGED MY LIMITS, YOU KNOW? SO I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GIVE UP..
HAHA

...LET'S GO HOME TOGETHER.
THEN IT'S A PROMISE.
...WHOA—
TOMOR-ROW...?
CAN I COME WITH YOU?
HEY.. ABOUT TOMORROW...
EXCEPT HIS FACE IS NOW THAT OF A MATURE ADULT...
HE SMILED.
ENJI—
JUST LIKE IN THE PAST—
I'M...
SO HAPPY...

REALLY?
...
THEN WE'LL LOOK AT THE STARS TOGETHER.
LIKE BACK WHEN WE WERE KIDS—
... ...
UH—
WHAT AM I SAYING?
THERE'S NO WAY ENJI WANTS SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
BONK
AM I STUPID...?
I GOT CARRIED AWAY
GUESS I SHOULD LAUGH IT OFF WITH A "JUST KIDDING"—
MAYBE HE WANTS TO REFUSE.
NOD
I... IS HE OBJECTING?

...WHICH MUST MEAN SHE'S SOMEONE...
MUCH MORE SPECIAL TO ENJI...
...PANG
...HUH?
THERE IT IS AGAIN—
THAT DULL PAIN I SEEM TO BE HAVING A LOT LATELY...
...ANYWAY, PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SAYING ANYTHING EXTRANEOUS.
I SEE— SO HE'S COMING, TOO?
AS IN, "WE'RE SEEING EACH OTHER," OR "WE HAVE A DEEP RELATIONSHIP"?
EXTRANEOUS?
...MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME...?
OH WELL— I'D BETTER GET TO SLEEP

OK?
CLATTER
CLATTER
YOU SAID YOU'RE GOING TO SHOW HER AROUND TOWN, BUT YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW THE AREA YET, EITHER.
I'LL BE THE GUIDE.
UH...
IT'S NOT BECAUSE I WANNA MAKE FUN OF YOU OR INTERFERE WITH YOUR DATE—
...I TOLD YOU, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
...
THEN IT'S SETTLED!
NIGHT?

I WONDER WHAT SHE'S LIKE?
...HIS GIRL-FRIEND, HUH?
MAYBE SHE MOVED OUT HERE SO SHE COULD BE WITH ENJI...
JUST WANTING TO BE WITH ENJI—
JUST WANTING TO KNOW HIS WORLD— THOSE FEELINGS MUST HAVE MADE ME COME OUT WITH THOSE WORDS.
I EVEN SURPRISE MYSELF—
SUCH PUSHY INSISTENCE...
I WAS SO HAPPY THAT HE'D SHOWN ME A SMILE...

HUH...?
BUT NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT...
IT CAN'T BE... IS THIS HIS "GIRLFRIEND"?
PFF?
HE'S...
A MAN. RIGHT?
HA HAHA HAHA HAHA!
HA HA HA HA HA
HUH?
UM..
OH—
I'M SORRY—
SIGH.
THE SAME ONE ON THE PHONE TH T DAY—?
THAT MEANS—
SMILE
YOU...?
..YOSHIMI-SAN...?
I'M KEISUKE YOSHIMI.
NICE TO MEET YOU.

SORRY, AM I TOO EARLY?
YOUR GIRLFRIEND, IS SHE NOT HERE YE—
I WAS TRYING TO BE TACTFUL BUT
ENJI!
GLARE
OKAY, OKAY, I'LL BE GOOD.
AHA HA HA
TCH
HELLO.
ARE YOU MIZUHO-KUN?
HUH?
OH— YES..
I HEAR YOU'RE GOING TO BE OUR TOUR GUIDE TODAY.
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME ON YOUR DAY OFF.
...
...

YOU GOT A PROPER PAYCHECK FOR IT, DIDN'T YOU?
I TAUGHT YOU IN THE PAST
SO IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT YOU'RE THE ONE TO TEACH ME NOW, RIGHT?
I WONDER WHY THAT IS?
RELIEF THAT HE DIDN'T BEAT ME TO GETTING A GIRLFRIEND?
UM, SO ABOUT WHEN DID YOU START TUTORING HIM?
HUH?
THEY SEEM PRETTY CLOSE..
NOW, NOW
YOU KNOW YOU APPRECIATED IT.
I WOULD'VE BEEN FINE IF YOU HAD JUST TOLD ME OVER THE PHONE.
I NEVER ASKED YOU TO.
IF YOU CALLED THE DAY BEFORE A TEST WITH SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, I'D COME FLYING...
BUT I WAS A GOOD TEACHER, WASN'T I?
...SINCE HIS THIRD YEAR IN JUNIOR HIGH.
I NEVER KNEW HE HAD A TUTOR.
I SEE
THAT WAS HOW IT STARTED.
I HAD JUST BEEN ASSIGNED TO A NEW POST, AND CAME TO LIVE IN AN APARTMENT OWNED BY ENJI'S PARENTS.

HUH?!
I'M A FORMER TUTOR OF ENJI'S.
YOU GOT WORKED UP ALL ON YOUR OWN
AHA HA HA
NO, NO
I-I-I-I'M SO SORRY!
WHAT AN AMUSING MISUNDERSTANDING YOU SEEM TO HAVE HAD!
ENJI'S LOVER IS A MAN?!
I KEEP TELLING YOU, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
DUUN
RELIEF THAT IT WASN'T ENJI'S GIRLFRIEND..
...IS WHAT I'M FEELING RIGHT NOW.
I SEE
A DOCTOR OF INTERNAL MEDICINE..
MY TRANSFER TO THE HOSPITAL OVER HERE WAS VERY SUDDEN.
THIS IS MY FIRST TIME IN THIS TOWN, SO I THOUGHT I'D HAVE ENJI SHOW ME AROUND.

THERE'S SOMEONE THAT KNOWS A SIDE OF ENJI...
THAT I DON'T KNOW.
AHA HA
YOU DID SO!
I DID NOT!
"OH TEACHER, PLEASE LOOK AFTER ME."
HE SAID
I THOUGHT IT WOULD ONLY BE FOR HIS JUNIOR HIGH SENIOR YEAR, BUT THEN HE CRIED AND BEGGED ME TO STAY ON UNTIL HE GOT INTO COLLEGE...
L I A R.
OF COURSE I'M THE ONE WHO CUT OFF CONTACT WITH ENJI SO I CAN'T COMPLAIN, BUT...
ENJI SEEMS VERY RELAXED, TOO.
ASIDE FROM WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
I'VE NEVER SEEN EXPRESSIONS LIKE THESE FROM ENJI AIMED AT ME.
AND ANOTHER THING—
WHAT'S THAT UNIQUE-LOOKING BUILDING OVER THERE?
IT'S A SPORTS GYM.
O...OH, THAT'S—
YOU MIGHT PULL SOMETHING AT YOUR AGE
HOW RUDE!
OOH, SOUNDS NICE
MAYBE I'LL JOIN
...
...
HE EVEN CUT IN ON MY SENTENCE.
THIS IS UNUSUALLY TALKATIVE FOR ENJI.
BUT I'M NOT ANYMORE.
IN THE PAST, I WAS NUMBER ONE TO ENJI—
TIRED?

JUST WHEN WE WERE STARTING TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US..
I'LL WAIT FOR THE RIGHT TIMING AND TAKE OFF.
OH?
I'M OUT OF CIGARETTES.
IF I DON'T LIKE THIS FEELING OF ALIENATION...
I SHOULD HAVE JUST TAKEN MY LEAVE.
WHY DID I DECIDE TO TAG ALONG?
THIRD WHEEL
IS IT REALLY BECAUSE OF ME?
I CAN TELL ENJI'S BAD-MOOD BAROMETER HAS BEEN FALLING STEADILY SINCE THE TOUR OF THE CITY...
IT'S PROBABLY HIT ROCK BOTTOM BY NOW.
NO, NO... IT'S ALRIGHT.
THE USUAL— ONE CARTON, OKAY?
GO GET ME SOME AT THAT CONVENIENCE STORE ACROSS THE WAY.
WHY ME?
AFTER I HAND HIM HIS CIGARETTES..
I'LL JUST TAKE MY LEAVE.
OH— I... I'LL GO.

I CAN ALMOST HEAR HIM SAY IT...
"SEE? YOU SHOULD'VE GONE HOME."
AT THIS INVITATION—
WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME OVER TO MY PLACE AFTER THIS?
OH— NO... NOT AT ALL.
WHICH WOULD YOU LIKE?
OH THANK YOU
THIS ONE FOR YOU, RIGHT?
YEAH.
I COULD TELL FROM ENJI'S EXPRESSION THAT THAT'S WHAT HE WANTED ME TO DO, TOO.
...
...WHAT I REALLY SHOULD HAVE DONE WAS DECLINE AND HEAD HOME ON MY OWN...
HUH? CAN I REALLY?
BUT MY STUBBORN PRIDE WOULDN'T LET ME BACK DOWN, AND I ACCEPTED.
HMM, I DON'T THINK SO
I DON'T MAKE AS MUCH AS YOU MIGHT THINK
SO BEING A DOCTOR AND ALL IS YOUR PLACE REALLY LUXURIOUS?

SORRY FOR USING YOUR COUSIN AS A GOFER.
IT'S OKAY...
UM... YOU SEEM VERY FRIENDLY WITH ENJI.
YEAH— DESPITE OUR AGE DIFFERENCE.
...WE JUST SEEMED TO CLICK RIGHT FROM THE START.
...I SOUND SARCASTIC.
I'M REALLY GLAD YOU CAME ALONG TODAY, MIZUHO-KUN.
WE MIGHT'VE GOTTEN LOST IF IT WAS JUST ENJI.
THAT'S NOT TRUE—
WHEREAS THERE'S NOT ONE OUNCE OF UNDERSTANDING...
...BETWEEN ME AND ENJI RIGHT NOW..

GO ON AND BUY YOURSELF AN ICE CREAM OR SOMETHING AS A TREAT, ON ME.
I'M NOT SOME KID. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BRIBE ME.
チラ GLANCE
...
...
...
AT 18? OF COURSE YOU STILL ARE.
BUT I FEEL NO MALICE IN THE WAY THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER.
THEIR BANTER IS FILLED WITH RIBBING AND SARCASM...
"THE USUAL."
THAT'S ALL HE NEEDED TO SAY, AND ENJI UNDERSTOOD HIM
...
THEY SEEM REALLY COMFORTABLE WITH EACH OTHER—

I AM SURPRISED, THOUGH..
HAHA HAHA—
I REALLY DON'T FEEL...
ANY AVERSION TO HIM AT ALL...
NO—
DOES IT CREEP YOU OUT?
GRIN
THANK YOU.
... ...
I WAS WITH HIM ALL DAY, BUT...
...I NEVER GOT THAT IMPRESSION...

...ABOUT ENJI—
I CARE DEEPLY ABOUT HIM... EVER SINCE WE MET.

HAHA
BUT—
HEARING YOU SAY THAT MAKES ME A LITTLE HAPPY.

WHAT?

HUH? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE YOU WEREN'T.
I FEEL BAD... ...LIKE MAYBE I WAS A THIRD WHEEL TODAY..
OOPS

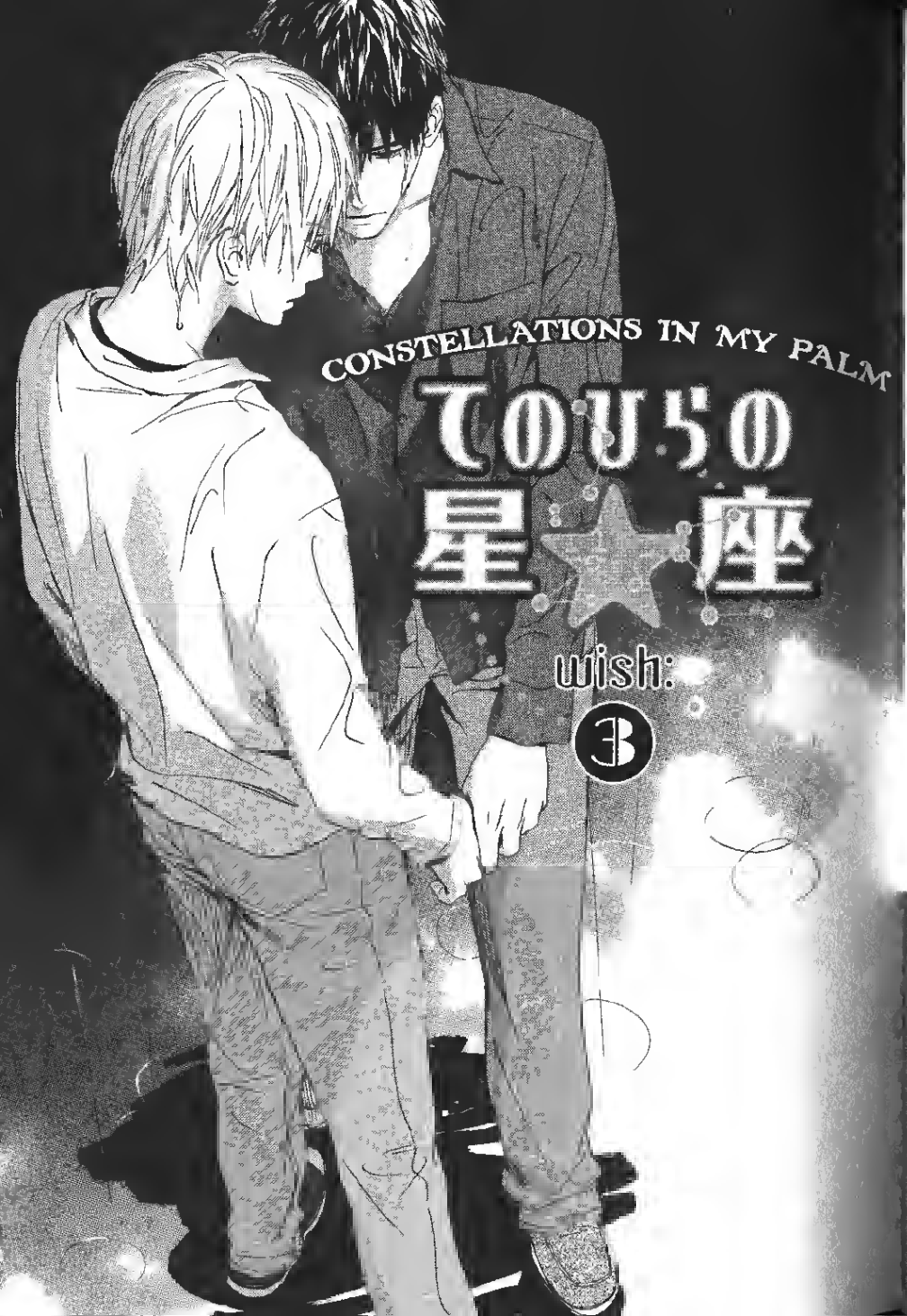
ABOUT ME—
I'M GAY.
WHA...
HASN'T ENJI TOLD YOU?
HUH? ABOUT WHAT?

FORTUNATELY, HE SEEMS TO BE FOND OF ME AS WELL.
THAT WAS FAST— THANKS.
HUH?
IS IT RAINING OUTSIDE?
OH!
KCHAK

...I'M ...TREMBLING...?
I EVEN ASKED FOR THIS TRANSFER...
BECAUSE ENJI IS HERE.
MY BODY... IS TREMBLING.
...YOU LOVE ENJI...?
DOES THAT MEAN...
YES, I LOVE HIM.

HEY...!
I SAID I'M FINE, YOSHIMI-SAN!
OH—
OOPS...
CLATTER
CLINK
CUT IT OUT!
HA HA
COME ON—
WHAT ARE YOU ACTING SO SHY ABOUT? IT'S ME, REMEMBER?
EVEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
THESE FEELINGS I'M HAVING.
...I—
I'LL BE ON MY WAY.

I GET IT NOW— ENJI'S ATTITUDE...
IT'S TO HIDE HIS EMBARRASSMENT.
HE SEEMS TO BE FOND OF ME AS WELL—
I SEE...
IT'S NO WONDER HE FELT I WAS IN THE WAY...
BEHIND MY...
CALM, COLLECTED THOUGHTS...
I'M FINE.
SOMETHING UNBEARABLE AND SCATHING BEGINS TO ROIL UP INSIDE OF ME.
YOU'RE SOAKED.
WHY DON'T YOU GET CHANGED?


CONSTELLATIONS IN MY PALM
てのひらの
星☆座
wish:
3

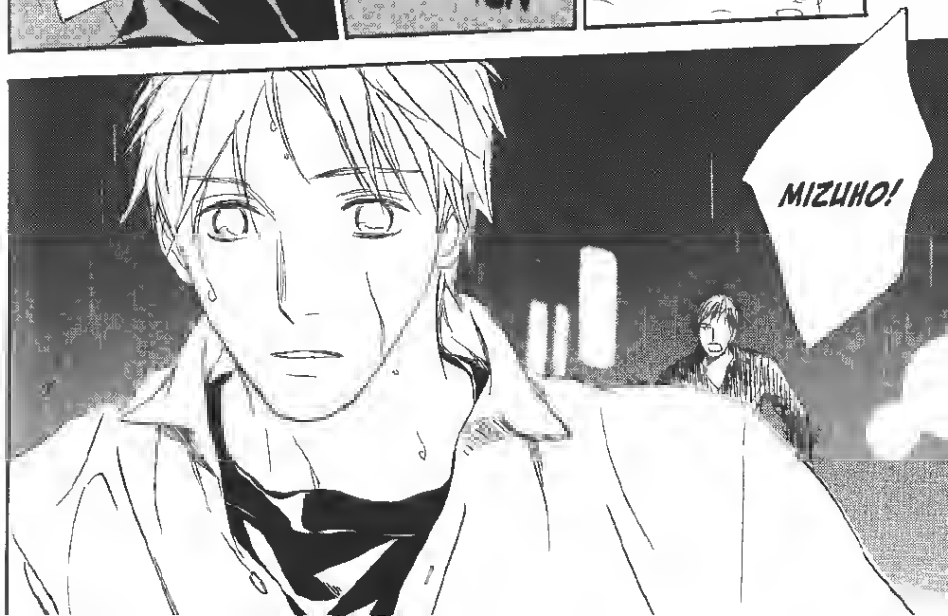
I SAID, WAIT!
HEY-
WAIT UP.
...SLAM
バタン
wish:2 END

WHAT ARE YOU ACTING SO SHY ABOUT? IT'S ME, REMEMBER?
FORTUNATELY, HE SEEMS TO BE FOND OF ME AS WELL.
WHY DO I...
FEEL SO—
WAIT!
SPLASH
SPLASH
WHY AM I...?
SHAAAA
TP
TP
I DO LOVE HIM.
THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP—

SPLASH...
JUST NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE GOT HERE--

...
...
NOT ONLY THAT--
BUT HE'S ADDRESSED ME INFORMALLY... FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR LIVES.
HE CALLED ME BY MY NAME.
...WHAT HAPPENED?
YANK

SPLASH
SPLASH
...
...
HOLD UP...!
SPLASH
ENJI--


MIZUHO!

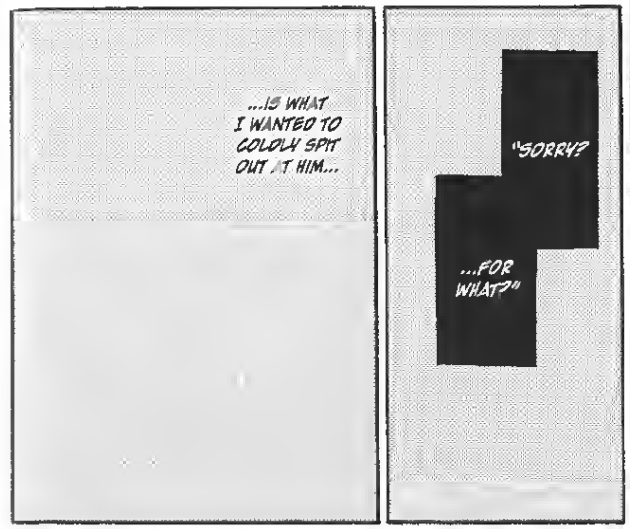
...
...GO BACK.
GRIP ?!
LET G—
...I'M SORRY.
THERE'S A LUMP IN MY THROAT.
BUT FOR SOME REASON...
THERE'S A SUFFOCATING PAIN IN MY CHEST AND...
IF I OPEN MY MOUTH NOW, I THINK I MIGHT CRY—

"THAT KISS... WAS IT BECAUSE YOU MISTOOK ME FOR YOSHIMI-SAN?"

IF I COULD...

I'D LIKE TO ASK HIM.

I'M SORRY.
DON'T TREMBLE—
DON'T LET ENJI NOTICE—

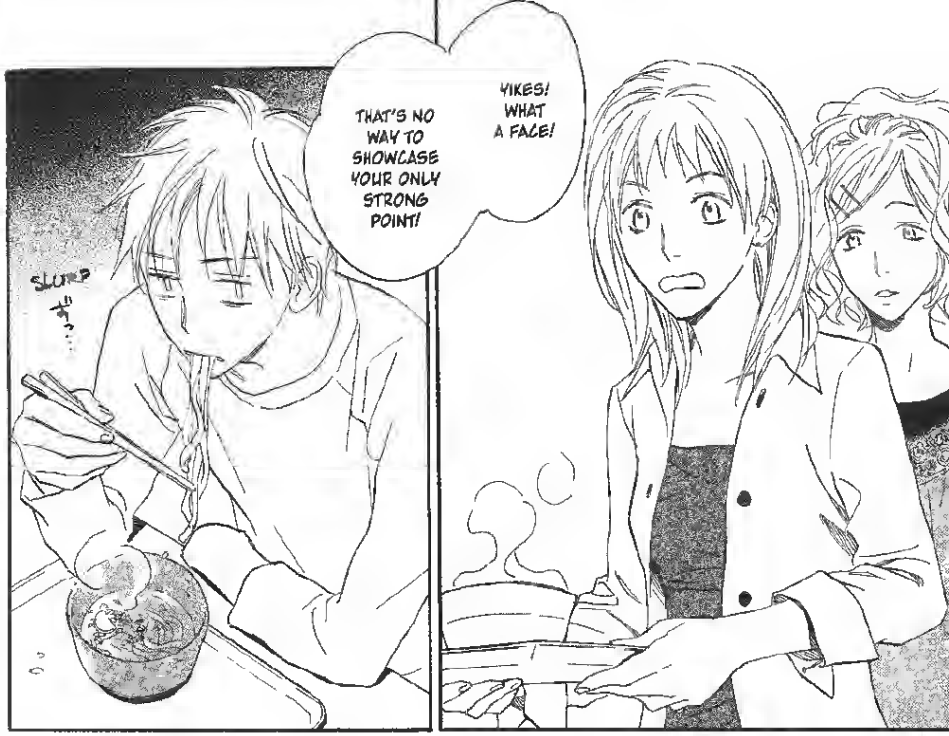

...IS WHAT I WANTED TO COLDLY SPIT OUT AT HIM...
"SORRY? ...FOR WHAT?"

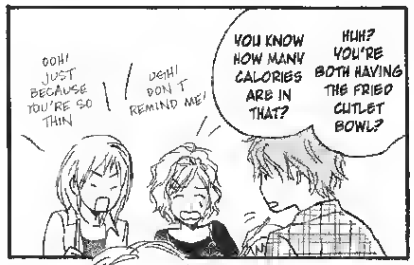
I'M SURE I'LL START TO CRY.
BUT IF I SPEAK NOW...

I DON'T WANT TO CRY IN FRONT OF ENJI.
I DON'T WANT HIM TO SEE ME WEAK LIKE THIS.

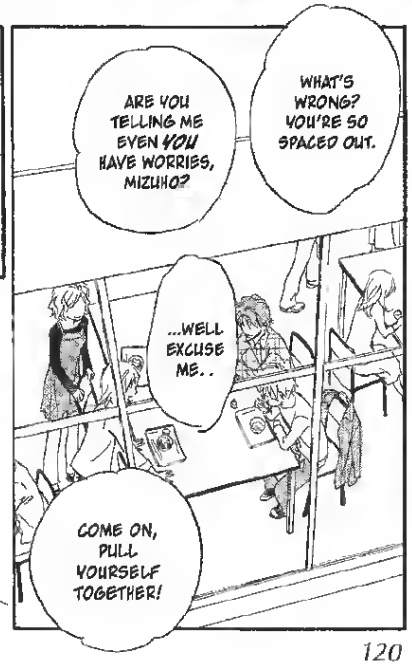
...
...
SHAAA
H''
アア...
ONE MORE INCIDENT I CAN'T DISCUSS... EVEN WITH ISSEI.
...I'LL GO BORROW AN UMBRELLA.
WAIT HERE.

ENJI CAME HOME SOON AFTERWARD, "BUT..."
KNOCK
...MIZUHO?
SPLISH
11°
二十


SLURP
はぁ...
THAT'S NO WAY TO SHOWCASE YOUR ONLY STRONG POINT!
YIKES! WHAT A FACE!


OOH! JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE SO THIN
UGH! DON'T REMIND ME!
YOU KNOW HOW MANY CALORIES ARE IN THAT?
HUH? YOU'RE BOTH HAVING THE FRIED CUTLET BOWL?

IN ADDITION TO THE KISSING INCIDENT...!
NOW THERE'S ONE MORE—


ARE YOU TELLING ME EVEN YOU HAVE WORRIES, MIZUHO?
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'RE SO SPACED OUT.
...WELL EXCUSE ME..
COME ON, PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER!

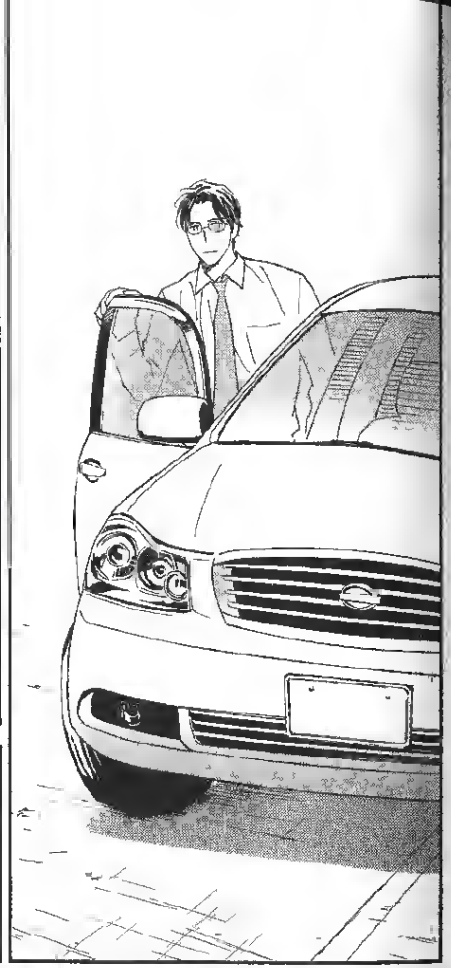
THERE'S ALSO...
THAT EMBRACE HE GAVE ME.
I WISH HE'D HAVE COME TO ME AND TOLD ME.
I'LL ADMIT IT'S A DIFFICULT THING TO TALK ABOUT, BUT--
PROBABLY STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT ENJI NEVER TOLD ME THE TRUTH HIMSELF.
AND YET, THIS UNEASE IN MY HEART...
...I GUESS THAT ONLY CONFIRMS THAT I'M NO LONGER "SPECIAL" TO ENJI...
BUT THOSE WERE ENJI'S ARMS--
I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT.
IF THAT HAD BEEN ISSEI...

I IGNORED HIM AND PRETENDED I WAS ASLEEP.
IF THEY'RE BOTH IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER, THEN WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, RIGHT?
AFTER SUDDENLY HEARING ABOUT ENJI AND YOSHIMI-SAN'S INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP...
I JUST CAN'T GET MY FEELINGS IN ORDER.
NOT ONLY DO I FEEL AWKWARD AFTER HAVING HIM SEE ME LIKE THAT, BUT...
EVEN THIS MORNING, I MADE AN EXCUSE AND LEFT THE HOUSE BEFORE I SAW HIM.

SIGH~
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME...
...
...
OKAY THEN~ MURAMATSU'S PLACE IT IS!
WANNA PASS IF YOU'RE NOT FEELING WELL?
YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHY? IT'S REASONABLE!
YOU CAN AFFORD ONE SIX-PACK!
YEAH, YOU'RE GOING TO DRINK AT LEAST THAT MUCH, RIGHT?
WHAT? THAT'S TOO MUCH!
THE PARTY FEE IS ONE SIX-PACK OF BEER PER PERSON!
Boo~
Boo~

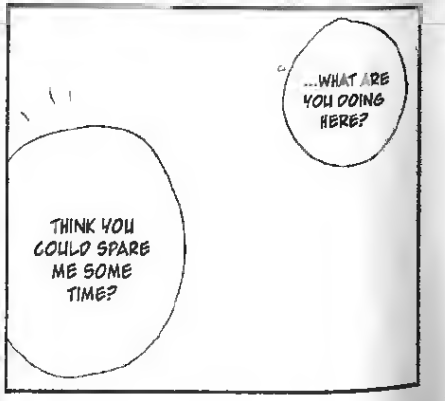
SURE, I FELT NERVOUS AND AWKWARD...
BUT EVEN MORE THAN THAT~
I FELT A DEEP NOSTALGIA AT HIS WARM TOUCH.
AND IT MADE ME HAPPY~
SO HAPPY~
AND FOR THIS CERTAINTY...
I WANTED TO GIVE UP MY ENTIRE BEING..
THAT TIME~
I DION'T MIND BEING EMBRACED AT ALL.

...YOSHIMI-SAN.



HI
...
DONE WITH YOUR CLASSES?

...
...


...WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
THINK YOU COULD SPARE ME SOME TIME?

I WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP THINKING ABOUT YESTERDAY IF I'M ALONE...
I'D RATHER DO SOMETHING TO TAKE MY MIND OFF OF IT.

I'M FINE.
THANKS, ISSEI.

SURE?

MIZUHO-KUN.

I KNOW I CAN'T AVOID HIM FOREVER, BUT...
I JUST DON'T WANT TO SEE ENJI RIGHT NOW.
...GUESS I'M A PRETTY NEGATIVE GUY.
HAHA

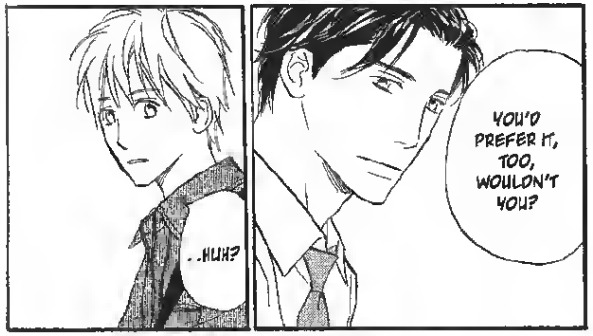
AND I JUST DON'T WANT TO BE WITH YOSHIMI-SAN RIGHT NOW.
...DON'T THEY NEED YOU AT THE HOSPITAL?
IT'S STILL CLINICAL HOURS, RIGHT?
MM— IT'S ALRIGHT.
THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING AN ADULT, YOU KNOW
BUT THOSE COMPLEX FEELINGS I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO PROCESS FROM LAST NIGHT...
ARE STILL A TANGLED MESS INSIDE ME.
HE'S GENTLE AND KIND...
AND IT'S NOT AS IF I DISLIKE HIM IN ANY WAY—
...AND ENJI—
ARE YOU GOING OUT WITH HIM BECAUSE IT'S AN "ADVANTAGE OF BEING AN ADULT," AS WELL?
OH—
WHOOPS—

WHO IS THAT, MIZUHO?
HE'S A TOTAL STUD!
I'LL PASS FOR TODAY.
...SORRY, GUYS.
SORRY THIS IS SO SHOOEN.
NO... I SHOULD BE THE SORRY ONE...
I APOLOGIZE FOR YESTERDAY.
NOT AT ALL.
THAT SHOULD BE MY LINE
NO— THANK YOU.
IT'S A BIT EARLY, BUT HOW ABOUT DINNER?

IN FACT, I WANT US TO LIVE TOGETHER.
NOT FOR ANY UNDERHANDED REASONS, I ASSURE YOU.
I REALLY AM VERY FOND OF ENJI.
I'LL BE FRANK
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN ENJI'S EXCUSE TO GO OUT.
AHA HAHA HAHA HAHA!
HAHA HAHA HAHA ...NO—
SORRY, SORRY.
...?
EASILY AMUSED
CLICK
CLICK
I GUESS I SHOULD JUST BE DIRECT WITH YOU.
THANK YOU...
SORRY FOR INVITING YOU OUT WHEN ALL I CAN GIVE YOU IS THIS!
I DON'T THINK HE REALLY NEEDED TO BE GUIDED AROUND THE CITY...
HE DROVE WITHOUT ANY HESITATION..
TO THIS PARK SO FAR AWAY FROM HIS CONDO.
. ENJI IS—?
ENJI'S KEEN ON THE IDEA, TOO.
WITH ENJI...?
YEAH.

...I KNEW THAT THINGS WERE AWKWARD BETWEEN ME AND ENJI, BUT...
IF ENJI REALLY DIDN'T SAY IT...
YOSHIMI-SAN WOULDN'T HAVE HESITATED LIKE THAT.
WELL... NO.
SO RESENTED—
SO AVOIDED—
THAT I'M SO HATED BY ENJI—
BEING TOLD THAT ENJI RETURNS HIS FEELINGS...
AND THAT THIS MAY BE ONE OF THE REASONS HE WANTS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE—

HELP HIM...?
IT'S A PERFECTLY NATURAL THING, I SUPPOSE.
WANTING TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH SOMEONE YOU LOVE—

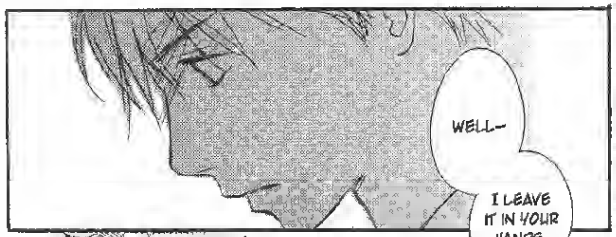

..HUH?
YOU'D PREFER IT, TOO, WOULDN'T YOU?
BUT HE SEEMS TO FEEL BEHOLDEN TO HIS FAMILY AND CAN'T SEEM TO BRING IT UP WITH THEM.
DO YOU THINK YOU COULD HELP HIM OUT?

OIO—
. ENJI TELL YOU THAT?
BECAUSE YOU DON'T SEEM TO BE GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH ENJI.

WHY...
...DO I FEEL SO SAD?

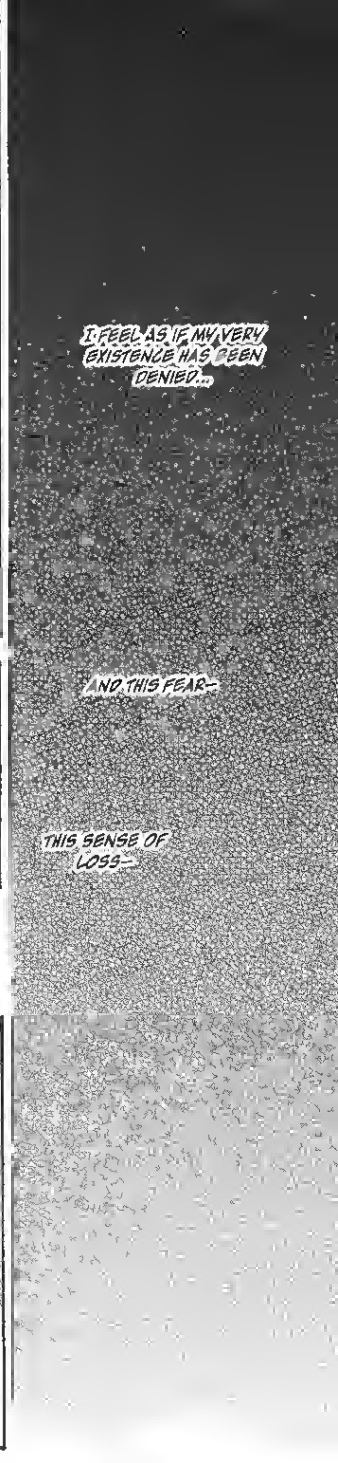
PHEW—
MY HEART HURTS...
ROLL

YOU WERE APART FOR A LONG TIME— IT CAN'T BE HELPED.

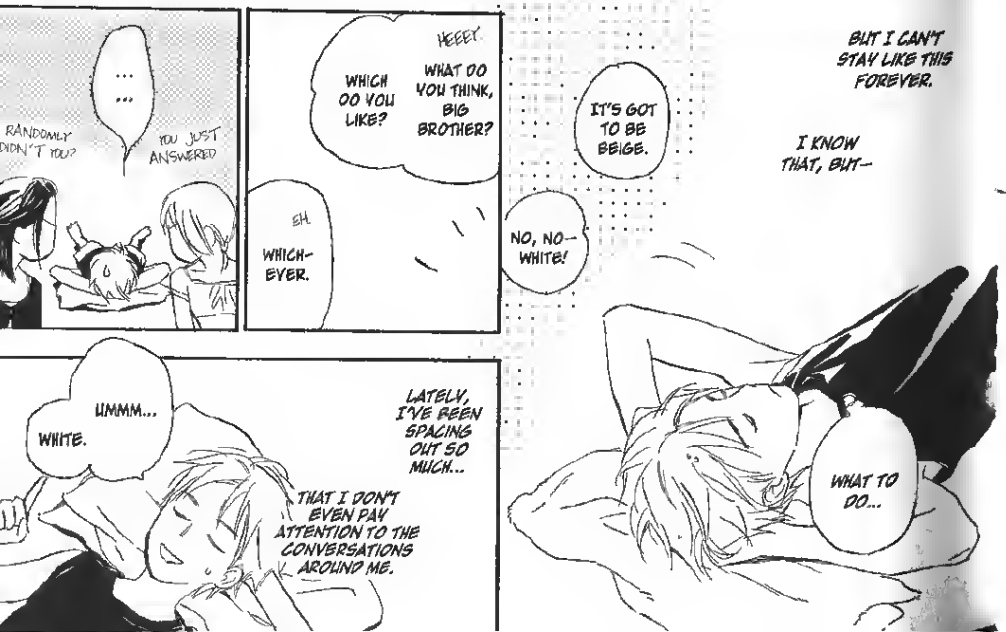

WELL—
I LEAVE IT IN YOUR HANDS.

WHY...
...DO I FEEL SUCH PAIN?

I'LL TAKE YOU HOME.
OH— NO, IT'S OKAY..


I FEEL AS IF MY VERY EXISTENCE HAS BEEN DENIED...
AND THIS FEAR—
THIS SENSE OF LOSS—

BUT THIS TIME, IT FEELS A LITTLE DIFFERENT--
I FEEL LIKE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN ME AND ENJI HAS GROWN EVEN FURTHER APART THAN BEFORE.
AS I NOW THINK OF AND RECOGNIZE ENJI AS A GROWN MAN.
IT COMES FROM THE AWKWARDNESS I FEEL...



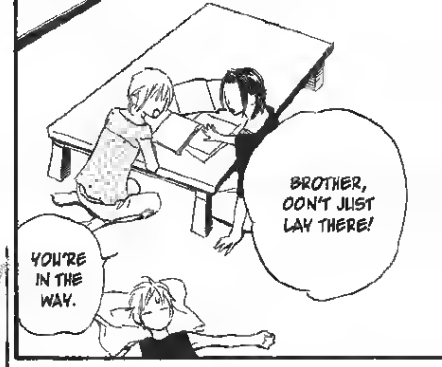
BUT I CAN'T STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER.

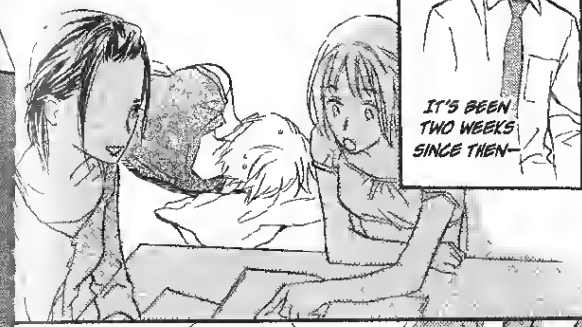
I KNOW THAT, BUT--

ENJI STILL DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE TALKED TO THE FAMILY ABOUT IT.

I WANT US TO LIVE TOGETHER.

IT'S BEEN TWO WEEKS SINCE THEN--





I FEEL AN UNCOMFORTABLE PAIN IN MY HEART WHENEVER I THINK ABOUT THOSE TWO...

I STILL HAVEN'T SORTED OUT MY FEELINGS.

SO I AVOID THINKING ABOUT THEM ALTOGETHER.

YOSHIMI-SAN ASKED ME TO KEEP OUR LITTLE TALK A SECRET FROM ENJI...
LIKE YELL AT HIM TO MOVE OUT, OR...?
NO THAT MAKES ME SOUND LIKE A LITTLE KID
ANYWAY, IS THERE EVEN ANYTHING I CAN DO?

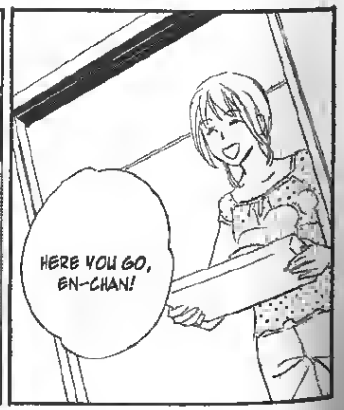
FLAP...
GLANCE
I MISSED THE TIMING TO GET BACK TO MY ROOM...
...YOUR HAIR...
IT'S DRIPPING—
...
...
I WISH SOMEONE WOULD COME BACK IN HERE...

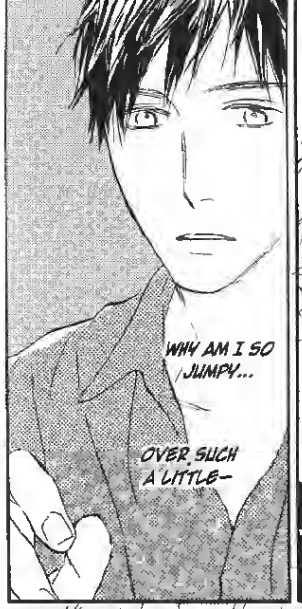
EN-CHAN'S NOT HOME YET?
...TOTALLY UNLIKE SOMEBODY ELSE AROUND HERE.
HE'S SO ADMIRABLE— WORKING PART-TIME TO HELP PAY FOR HIS TUITION
YEAH.
TIME TO RETREAT
YOU GUYS, HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP THIS NOISE UP?
F. THER HAS ALREADY GONE TO BED
YAAAY, WHITE! WHITE!
WHAAAT?
JOLT
CLATTER
CLATTER
OH, IT'S EN-CHAN!
I'M BACK.
WELCOME HOME. ARE YOU HUNGRY?
I'M ALRIGHT— I HAD SOME BUNS EARLIER.
OH, BUT THAT CAN'T BE ENOUGH FOR YOU, RIGHT?
HOLD ON, I'LL MAKE YOU SOMETHING RIGHT AWAY.
I WANNA MAKE IT-
ME TOO-
SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU

...PLEASE ANSWER...

'NIGHT.

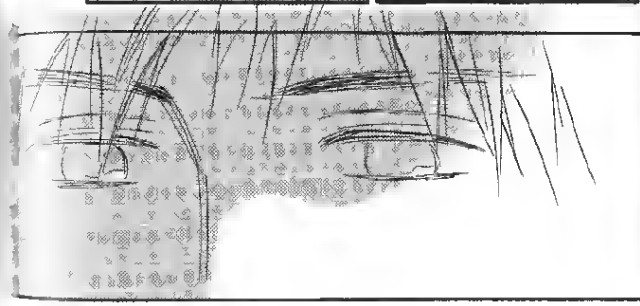
S...


HERE YOU GO, EN-CHAN!

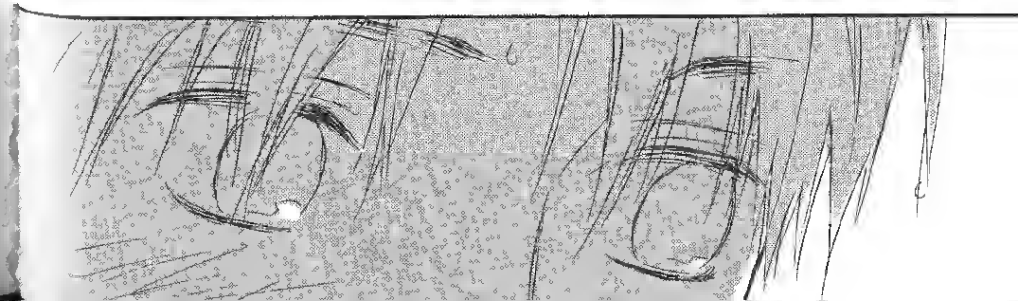

WHY AM I SO JUMPY...
OVER SUCH A LITTLE-

OH...

FLINCH



...DO I SCARE YOU?



FROM HERE...
I'VE GOT A LECTURE TO GO TO AGAIN TOMORROW...
BUT I CAN'T SLEEP.
THE STARS ARE TOO FAINT TO EVEN MAKE OUT ANY CONSTELLATIONS...
BUT OH...
!?
WHUMP
CLAK

DO I SCARE YOU?
BUT WHENEVER ENJI IS IN FRONT OF ME...
I BECOME SO FLUSTERED--
IT'S NOT THAT HE SCARES ME...
WHY AM I SO SELF-CONSCIOUS?
JUST BECAUSE HE TOUCHES MY HAND OR FOREHEAD...
STUPID...
THUNK
WHEW..
..GOTTA PULL MYSELF TOGETHER...
HIS STRONG ARMS... HIS WARMTH AGAINST MY BACK...
BUT WHEN I RECALL...
I BECOME AGITATED.

HE COULD'VE KEPT THE TOPIC GOING A LITTLE LONGER.
...ABOUT WHAT I SAID EARLIER...
JOLT
ドキ...
S... SO—
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO FOR SUMMER VACATION?
I'M GONNA GO BACK HOME, JUST FOR OBON.
I'LL BE WORKING AT MY PART-TIME JOB THE REST OF THE TIME.
I SEE...
HAHA

SO...
DOES THAT MEAN—
WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN SO LONG...
...I FEEL A LITTLE AWKWARD.
...
...
I'M NOT MEANING TO SCARE YOU.
...IT'S JUST—

UM...
BARLEY TEA... WANT SOME?
OH...
...WH—
.. OKAY.

OH...

...HE SURPRISED ME.

...
...
THANKS.
...TRY TO ACT NORMAL—
NORMAL...
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO TALK ABOUT?

AND I STILL HAVEN'T GOTTEN OVER WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER...

OH MAN...
I'M ALWAYS CRYING...
I'M SO UNCOOL.
JUST KNOWING THAT...
RELEASED ALL THE TENSION IN MY HEART AND—

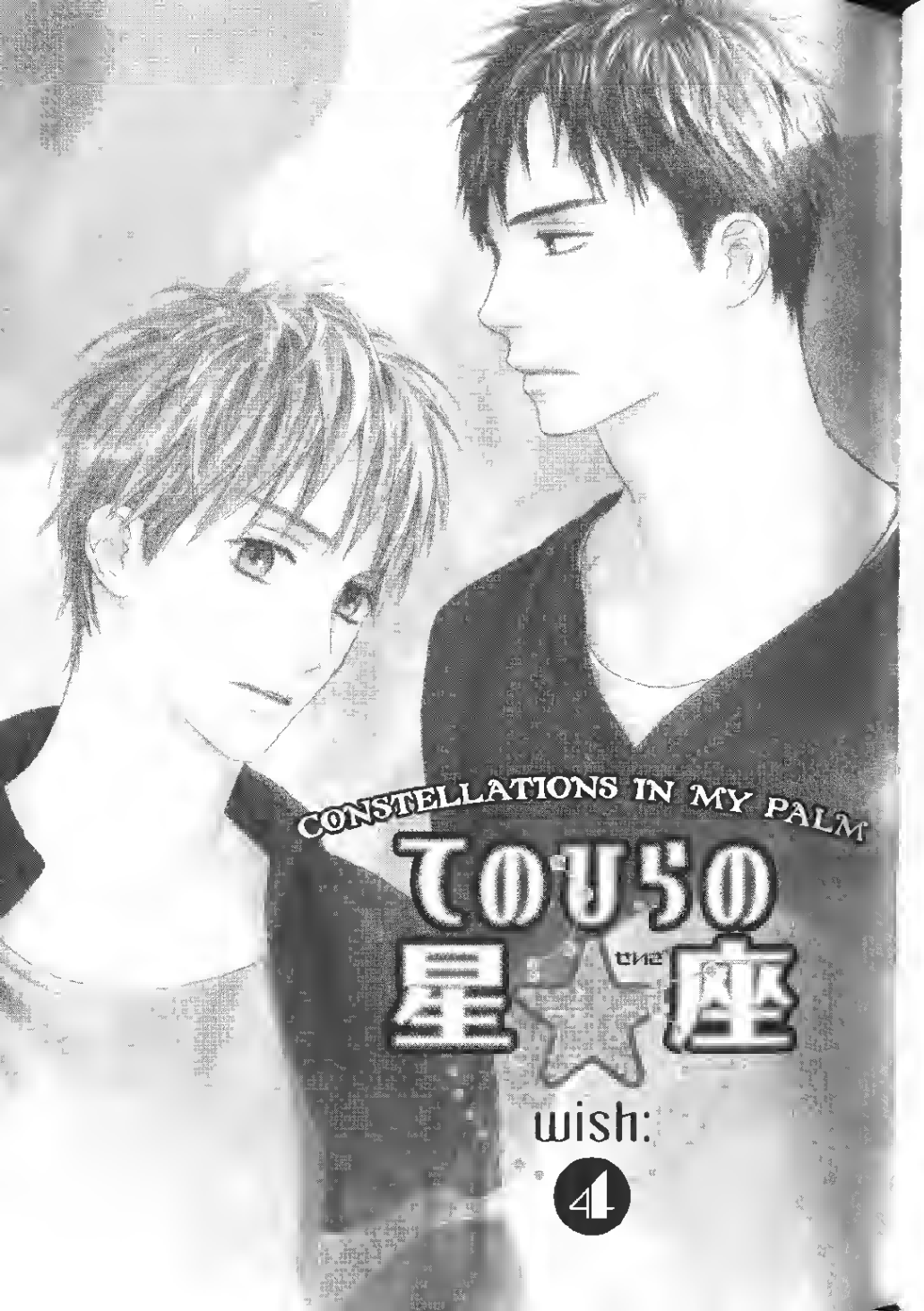
THE WARMTH OF A KINDNESS THAT CONSOLES...
...ENJI'S CLUMSY BUT GENTLE TOUCH...

SORRY IF I'VE BEEN MAKING YOU UNCOMFORTABLE.

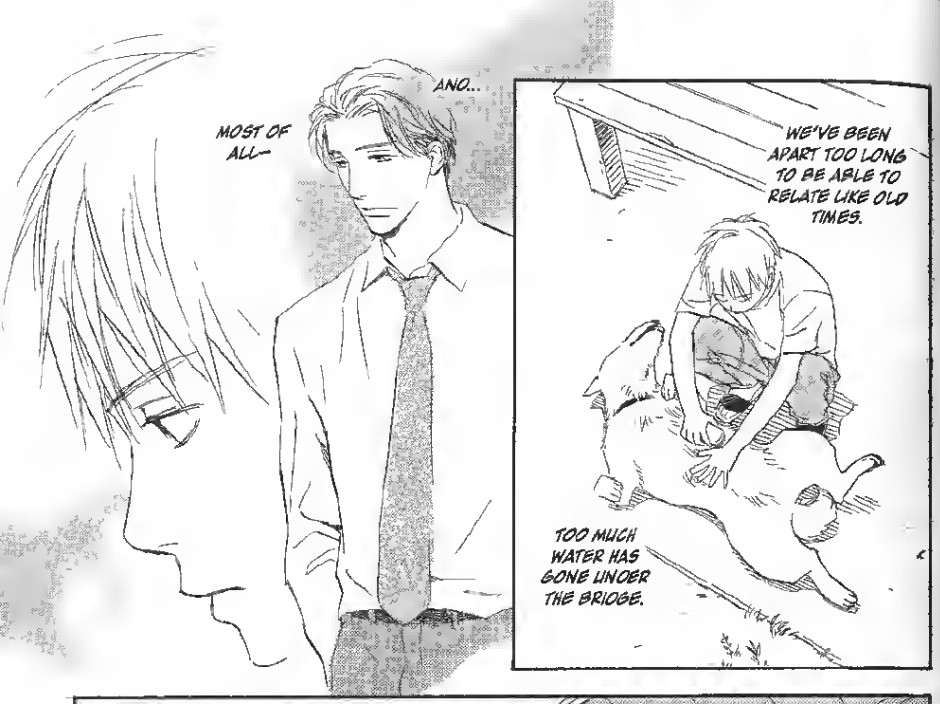
ENJI HAS BEEN JUST AS FLUSTERED AS I HAVE...?
AND THAT'S WHY HE'S BEEN ACTING THE WAY HE HAS...?

DRIP

SO HE DIDN'T HATE ME AFTER ALL.
S... SORRY—
...WHOA—
MIZU—


CONSTELLATIONS IN MY PALM
てのひらの星座
THE
wish:
4

IF ONLY THIS TENDERNESS...
COULD BE WITH ME FOREVER...
wish: 3 END


ANO...
MOST OF ALL—
WE'VE BEEN APART TOO LONG TO BE ABLE TO RELATE LIKE OLD TIMES.
TOO MUCH WATER HAS GONE UNDER THE BRIDGE.

I'M STILL FINDING IT HARD TO ACCEPT
THAT MY COUSIN IS GOING OUT WITH A MAN.
ENJI—
HE'S PROBABLY AT YOSHIMI-SAN'S TODAY..

YO, LET'S WATCH A VIDEO.
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL.

...NO, I CAN'T ALWAYS BE RELYING ON HIM
SHOULD I TRY DISCUSSING IT WITH ISSEI?
WOOF WOOF

YOSHIMI-SAN MAY BE GROWING IMPATIENT BY NOW.
.. AND I STILL HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN TO DO ANYTHING...
SNIFF SNIFF
DO YOU THINK YOU COULD HELP HIM OUT?

BY THE TIME I WOKE UP, IT WAS LATE AND EVERYONE WAS ALREADY GONE.
WE ARE GOING TO NISHIDA-SAN'S HOUSE
I KNOW ITS SATURDAY BUT JEEZ! SLEEPING SO LATE!
BY SIS

RUNS A BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION BIZ

HELLO-
THAT'S UNUSUAL. EVERYBODY OUT?
YEAH.

OH YEAH... THEY WERE DISCUSSING SOMETHING ABOUT GOING OUT...
NISHIOA-SAN IS AN OLD FRIEND OF DAD'S..
ANO IS PRACTICALLY A PART OF OUR FAMILY.

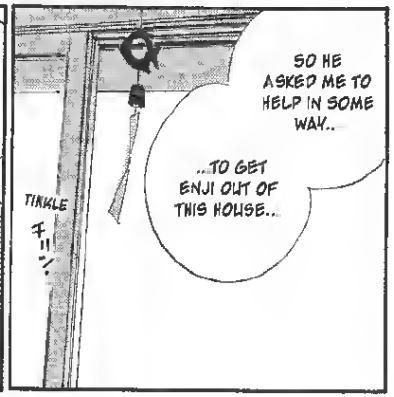
HE'S A JOVIAL, HEARTY KIND OF GUY.
MAYBE IT WOULD'VE CHEERED ME UP IF I'D GONE ALONG

IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE I HAD THAT LITTLE TALK WITH ENJI...
WHIMPER
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE WE CAN GO IMMEDIATELY BACK TO HOW WE WERE IN THE PAST, JUST LIKE THAT...

I'M SURE I CAN TRUST ISSEI TO KEEP THIS TO HIMSELF.
I FEEL RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS SOMEONE ELSE'S PRIVATE LIFE BUT...

..HE SEEMS TO FEEL BEHOLDEN TO MY FAMILY
WE LOVE EN-CHAN!
AH—
CUZ THEY SEEM SO DELIGHTED I SEE
AND SAYS HE WANTS THEM TO LIVE TOGETHER.
YOSHIMI-SAN EVEN TRANSFERRED OVER TO THIS TOWN BECAUSE OF ENJI...
POP
BUT ENJI'S STAYING HERE, RIGHT?
HIS NAME'S YOSHIMI-SAN.
THE MAN FROM BEFORE—
HE AND ENJI SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SEEING EACH OTHER SINCE BEFORE THEY CAME HERE.
HUH...

...
...
SO WHY DON'T YOU, THEN?


TINKLE
SO HE ASKED ME TO HELP IN SOME WAY..
..TO GET ENJI OUT OF THIS HOUSE..

THUD
HOW'RE THINGS GOING WITH ENJI?
DIRECT

...SO—
THANKS
HERE YOU GO

...WH-.. WHAT..
HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED?
IS THAT GUY WITH THE GLASSES WHO CAME TO SEE YOU THREE WEEKS AGO INVOLVED SOMEHOW?
URK
IT'S BEEN ON MY MIND, BUT I'VE BEEN SO BUSY WORKING LATELY THAT I HAVEN'T HAD TIME TO TALK TO YOU.

I JUST WONDERED IF THAT WAS THE REASON..
YOU SEEM SO DOWN LATELY.

...MY HEART IS LIKE A CHAOTIC JUNK DRAWER— ONE BIG, HUGE MESS.
...I JUST DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ANYMORE.
I CAN'T EVEN FIGURE MYSELF OUT.
WHAT'S PRECIOUS SHOULD BE IN THERE SOMEWHERE, BUT...
I JUST CAN'T FIND IT.
BUT...
I DON'T THINK IT'S THAT HE HATES ME OR ANYTHING, BUT...
...SO IN OTHER WORDS, MIZUHO—
TINK
チリ...
TINKLE
... ...
...ARE YOU BOTHERED THAT HIS LOVER IS A MAN?
MAYBE...
WHAT ISSEI IS SAYING IS RIGHT.
ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU'D PREFER, TOO?
I DON'T SEE ANY PROBLEM.
IT'S ONLY LOGICAL THAT I SHOULD ENTHUSIASTICALLY AGREE TO HELP HIM LEAVE.
I'M THE ONE WHO WAS SO VEXED OVER MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ENJI.
THE STABBING PAIN I FELT IN MY HEART THAT DAY RETURNS.
OR IS IT THAT YOU DON'T WANT ENJI TO LEAVE?
ENJI...
...SEEMS TO HAVE TOLD YOSHIMI-SAN THAT WE'RE NOT GETTING ALONG.
I DON'T KNOW.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU CAN'T BE IN LOVE WITH HIM?
I.. IT'S NOT THAT, BUT...
WHETHER IT CONCERNS YOUR FUTURE...
OR MATTERS OF LOVE..
MIZUHO, YOU'RE THE TYPE...
THAT ALWAYS CHOOSES THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE, YOU KNOW?
BUT THINK— IS THAT REALLY WHAT YOU WANT?
...IT'S TRUE.
AND ALWAYS MADE DECISIONS BASED ON THE SITUATION AT HAND, RATHER THAN ON MY OWN FEELINGS OR WISHES.
I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO GO WITH THE FLOW OF THINGS..
IT WAS JUST EASIER THAT WAY.

...ON MY MIND?
WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT ENJI IS ALWAYS ON YOUR MIND?
I'M ASKING IF YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH ENJI, TOO.
I...
..BUT— I'VE KNOWN HIM SINCE HE WAS BORN— HE'S MY COUSIN!
SO?
I... I... LOVE...?

WHEN OUR EYES MEET...
WHEN HE SMILES AT ME...
I DON'T CARE IF HE ACTS COLD—
I DON'T CARE IF THINGS ARE AWKWARD—
WHEN HE EMBRACES ME...
AT THOSE TIMES, THE SWEET STIR I FEEL—
YOU WANT HIM OUT OF THIS HOUSE?
NO—
MY TRUE...
HONEST FEELING...
BUT WHEN IT COMES TO ENJI...
WHY AM I SO...?
UNTIL NOW, I WAS FINE WITH THAT.
I ACCEPTED THINGS.
I CAN'T MAKE MYSELF JUST DO WHAT YOSHIMI-SAN SAYS AND HAND ENJI OVER TO HIM.
THE REASON I GAVE UP ON STUDYING THE STARS AS JUST BEING A DREAM...
IS BECAUSE I DECIDED FROM THE VERY START IT WAS JUST THAT— NOTHING BUT AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM.
EVEN WITH GIRLS...
I ONLY GOT TOGETHER WITH OR BROKE UP WITH THEM AT THEIR INSISTENCE.
OH—
COULD IT BE—
COULD THIS MEAN...?
CAN YOU HONESTLY FEEL HAPPY FOR ENJI...
...KNOWING THAT HE'S IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE?

EVEN WITH ISSEI SO CLOSE LIKE THIS...
I FEEL NOTHING.
BUT WITH ENJI, I FEEL AS IF EVERY NERVE IN MY BODY IS PULLED TAUT.
URK Y-YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT
I BET I KNOW YOU MUCH BETTER THAN YOU DO YOURSELF, MIZUHO.
HUH...? YOU KNEW?
OF COURSE. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK I'VE KNOWN YOU?
CLONK
WHY NOT TELL ENJI HONESTLY?
NOPE. STUFF LIKE THIS, YOU'VE GOT TO GET ON YOUR OWN.
...YOU COULD'VE TOLD ME IF YOU KNEW.
HEH HEH HEH
NO ONE SAID YOU'RE DENSE
WELL EXCUSE ME FOR BEING SO DENSE.
...SO YOU'VE FINALLY REALIZED.
OH... I GET IT NOW.
I LOVE HIM—
...MULTIPLIES BY THE HUNDREDS— THE THOUSANDS— AND OVERTAKES MY HEART.
THAT'S WHY I COULDN'T STAND TO HAVE HIM SEE ME IN SUCH A PATHETIC LIGHT...
AND I DISTANCED MYSELF FROM HIM.
EVER SINCE WE WERE KIDS...
ENJI HAS BEEN MORE DEAR AND MORE PRECIOUS TO ME THAN ANYONE.
THE REASON MY FEELINGS ARE SO MESSED UP—
THE REASON WHY ENJI'S EVERY LITTLE ACTION EITHER SENDS ME INTO ELATION OR DESPAIR—

WOOF
WOOF
WOOF!
EEP
YOU, TOO, WANSUKE! CUT IT OUT...
HM?
HI.
OH...
WELCOME BACK. THANKS FOR HAVING ME OVER.
THUD
WHOA!
NO PROB, NO PROB
JUST DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS!
BUT— YOSHIMI-SAN...
WHO CARES?
IF IT COMES TO IT, STEAL ENJI AWAY FROM HIM!
THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, BUT...
WRIGGLE
WRIGGLE
TICKLE
TICKLE
HA HA HEE HEE
CUT IT OUT, YOU JERK!
IT'LL BE FINE.
NO WAY! I BET IT HURTS.
BEFORE THAT, LET ME JUST TRY OUT THIS NEW MOVE I LEARNED.
JUST GET OFF ME— YOU'RE HEAVY!
IDIOT!
PRO-WRESTLING FAN
OUT OF THE BLUE...
STRANGE, ISN'T IT? SEX AND WRESTLING HAVE SIMILAR-LOOKING POSITIONS.
OWW

IF YOU DON'T LIKE HIM BEING DISGUSTED WITH YOU, GO TELL HIM THAT.
HUP.
SEE YA—
AT ANY RATE, YOU'VE FIRST GOTTA PUT EVERYTHING INTO WORDS—
RIGHT?
MM
LEAVING?
OH, I'LL LEAVE THIS TAPE IF YOU WANNA WATCH IT
NAH
CLATTER
CLATTER
PUT EVERYTHING INTO WORDS...?
SIGH
AS IN...
"I LOVE YOU"...?
BLUSH
...
...

THUNK
...AS COLD AS ALWAYS, I SEE.
I GUESS THAT WAS A PRETTY COMPROMISING SITUATION HE CAUGHT US IN, HUH?
HMMM
...HE'S DISGUSTED WITH ME.
HUH?
THAT'S THE SAME EXPRESSION I SAW ON HIS FACE THE TIME I FELL OUT OF THE TREE.
I BET HE'S THINKING HOW IMMATURE AND CHILDISH I AM.
...AN EXASPERATED, DISAPPOINTED EXPRESSION...
MIZU...
...
...

SLAM
ENJI...?
THUD
SORRY I INTERRUPTED YOU.
EMBARRASSING? IT SURE WAS.
SHOWING YOU SUCH AN EMBARRASSING SCENE
NO... I SHOULD BE THE SORRY ONE.
HA HA
OH... THAT
SOR...
WAS I MAKING TOO MUCH NOISE?
OH-
BONK BONK
NO, NOT THAT-
WALL
...NOW THAT I'VE ADMITTED IT TO MYSELF...
CLAK
I'M NOT SURE I CAN FACE HIM THE SAME WAY AGAIN.
GRAB
WHAT...?

THAT WAS REALLY JUST A J—
THEY'RE ALWAYS FLIRTING WITH EACH OTHER.
SURELY HE DOESN'T TAKE SUCH A JOKE SERIOUSLY...?
...OH—
...SEEING AS HOW YOU WERE INTERRUPTED
YOU MUST BE FRUS-TRATED..
EN—
FLINCH
A KISS... LIKE THIS—
...WHY?
..!

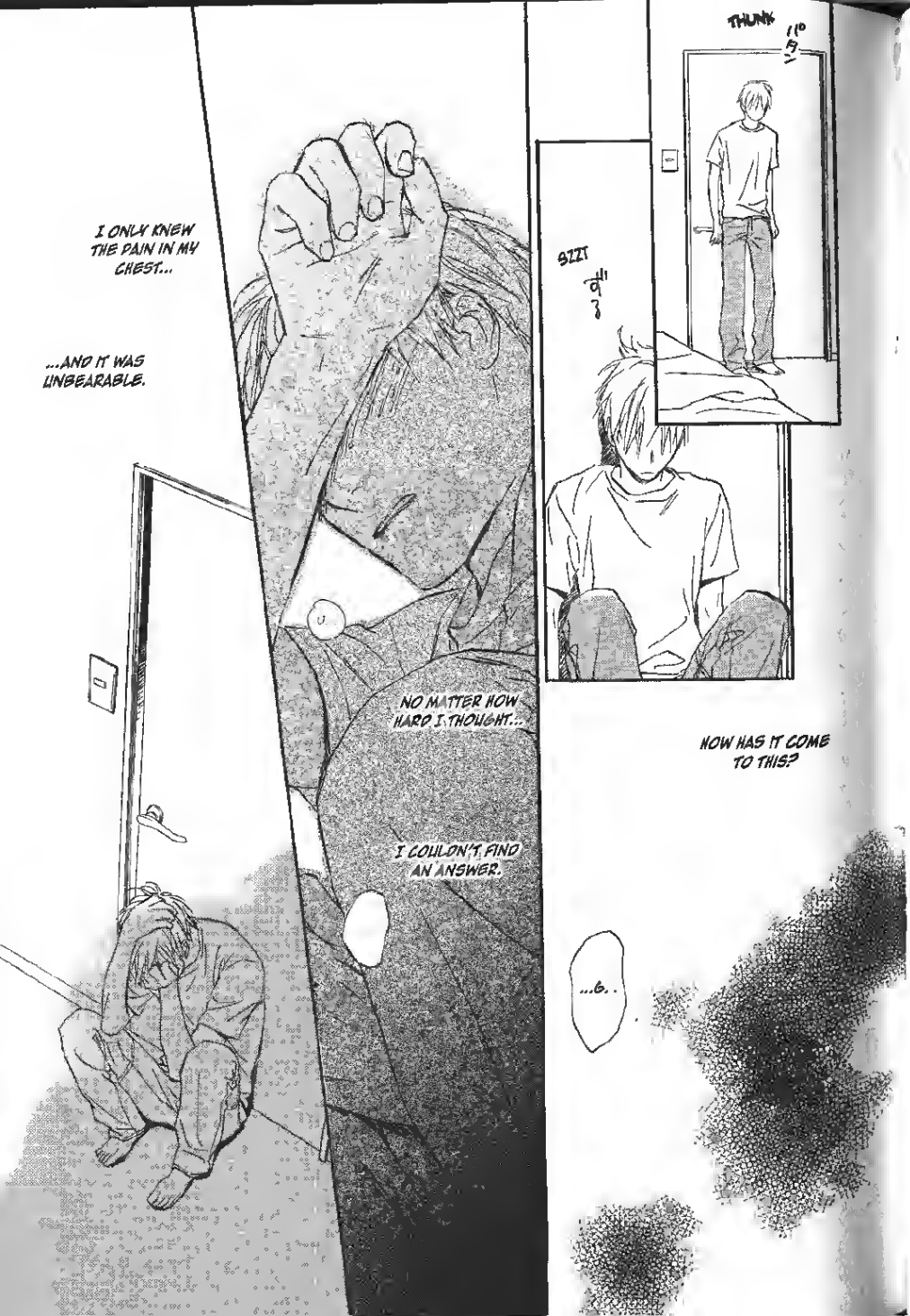
HUH...?
DOGS IN HEA
WHAT?
W-W-WH—
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
ACTING LIKE DOGS IN HEAT, RIGHT OUT IN THE OPEN LIKE THAT, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY.
WHAT KIND OF MISUNDERSTANDING DOES HE HAVE?!
CREAK
THERE'S NO NEED TO HIDE IT.
WITH ISSEI? I'M NOT GOING OU—
WHY WOULD HE THINK THAT?
I REMEMBER THEY SAID YOU GUYS ARE STUCK TOGETHER ALL THE TIME.
YOU'RE GOING OUT WITH HIM, RIGHT?

THUD
WHUMP
LET ME GO...!
YOU WANT TO GO TO YOSHIMI-SAN, BUT YOU CAN'T.
SO YOU'RE TAKING IT OUT ON ME.
...THAT'S FRUSTRATED.
YOU'RE THE ONE...
BULL'S-EYE, HUH?

I CAN PICK UP...
WHERE HE LEFT OFF.
BA-THUMP
...
I CAN FEEL MYSELF WANTING... TO GIVE MYSELF UP TO HIM.
I DON'T WANT TO BE PUSHED ALONG LIKE THIS WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT'S GOING ON...
IF IT'S ENJI, I CAN FORGIVE HIM FOR ANYTHING...
...I LOVE ENJI.
I CAN STAND ANYTHING.
BUT NOT LIKE THIS-

SHIVER
I DON'T WANT TO BE A REPLACEMENT ANYMORE... MISTAKEN ANYMORE...
FOR SOMEONE ELSE.
...I'VE HAD ENOUGH
GENTLY...
HE EMBRACES ME AS IF HOLDING SOMETHING FRAGILE...
I FEEL...
SUCH YEARNING FOR HIM..
AND I FEEL HIS BREATH ON MY NECK.
BUT..
THERE IS ALREADY ANOTHER WITH WHOM ENJI SHARES HIS FEELINGS.
HIS CONFESSION IS NOT THE TRUTH.

...THE ONE..
...THAT I LOVE IS-
...I'M NOT GOING OUT WITH HIM, I TELL YOU.
...YOU, MIZUHO.


I ONLY KNEW THE PAIN IN MY CHEST...
...AND IT WAS UNBEARABLE.
NO MATTER HOW HARD I THOUGHT...
I COULDN'T FIND AN ANSWER.
THUNK
SIZZ
HOW HAS IT COME TO THIS?
...G..

BUT AS LONG AS ENJI IS GOING OUT WITH YOSHIMI-SAN...
NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES HE SAYS HE LOVES ME-
NO MATTER HOW MANY KIND EMBRACES HE GIVES ME-
IT'S ALL JUST A LIE.
...GET OUT!
I DON'T WANT TO BE CAUGHT UP IN YOUR PROBLEMS ANYMORE!
THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANT TO SAY.
I'D JUST BE HIS PLAYTHING-
AND I COULDN'T TAKE THAT.
...ALL RIGHT.

I REMAINED IN MY ROOM.
BUT IT'S SO SUDDEN!
OH DEAR-
I COULD HEAR EVERYBODY'S SURPRISE, BUT...
I EVEN DECLINED DINNER, SAYING I WAS COMING DOWN WITH A COLD.
I'LL BRING YOU SOME MEDICINE LATER
BUT THIS IS EN CHAN'S LAST NIGHT HERE
WHAAAT?
TOMORROW?
I WONDER IF ENJI TOLD THEM ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH YOSHIMI-SAN?
BUT I'M SURE IF HE HAD, THERE WOULD BE MORE OF AN UPROAR. .
...AND THERE ISN'T ONE.
ALTHOUGH SURPRISED BY HIS SUDDEN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WAS MOVING OUT, NO ONE ACTUALLY SEEMS TO HAVE TRIED TO STOP HIM.
IT SEEMS ENJI...
CONTACTED YOSHIMI-SAN IMMEDIATELY YESTERDAY AFTER THE INCIDENT.
ENJI IS LEAVING THIS HOUSE—
YEAH.
I DION'T HAVE MUCH STUFF ANYWAY.
ARE THESE ALL THE BOXES?
I'LL TAKE THAT.
IT MUST BE HEAVY.
OH— THANK YOU!
YOU LADIES JUST SIT BACK AND RELAX.

POUF
NOT ONLY THAT, BUT I ENDED UP HELPING MY RIVAL IN LOVE.
IN THE END...
I ENDED UP THE CLOWN.
OH WELL, WHATEVER...
IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.
I WONDER HOW ENJI EXPLAINED THINGS...?
MAYBE ENJI...
GET OUT!
TO CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY—
TO STEEL HIS RESOLVE—
TO MAKE ME SAY THOSE WORDS—
CALCULATED THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN..
AND ORCHESTRATED SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
ENJI IS LEAVING THIS HOUSE TO GO LIVE WITH YOSHIMI-SAN.
THAT'S THE REALITY.
WHUMP
...MAYBE I'M OVER-THINKING THINGS.
I DON'T KNOW.
BUT I GUESS IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW.
REALIZING AT LAST THAT I WAS IN LOVE, ONLY TO IMMEDIATELY HAVE MY HEART BROKEN...
BUT NOW I GUESS THOSE TWO HAVE GOTTEN THE LIFE THEY WANTED.
SLIDE...
SIGH
MY HEART'S TORN APART IN TWO.
I WANT TO BE WITH ENJI...
BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE WITH ENJI.
I WANT TO STOP HIM...
BUT I DON'T WANT TO STOP HIM.

MIZUHO-KUN.
I HEAR YOU'RE COMING DOWN WITH A COLD?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO EXAMINE YOU?
...I'M FINE.
OKAY THEN.
COME VISIT US ANY TIME YOU LIKE.
WE'LL BE WAITING!
...I HAVE TO THANK YOU.
YOU SAID SOMETHING TO ENJI, RIGHT?

THIS IS THE END-
MIZUHO-
EN-CHAN'S LEAVING NOW-
HE'S GOING AWAY FROM ME
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.
PLEASE TAKE GOOD CARE OF EN-CHAN
I WILL
CLATTER
カラ
OH THERE HE IS!

ENJI.
...
...
WOOF
WOOF
RRRR

BUT NOW THAT HE'S GONE...
ENJI HAD ONLY BEEN HERE FOR A MERE THREE MONTHS—
BUT HE'S A DOCTOR
I'M SURE HE'S VERY BUSY
I'M SURE HE'S FINE YOSHIMI-SAN SAID HE'S A GOOD COOK
THINGS FEEL STRANGELY OUT OF PLACE.
I HOPE HE'S EATING PROPERLY.
WOW, IT'S ALREADY BEEN A WEEK!
HOW TIME FLIES
I KNOW
I SHOULD BE SAD... I SHOULD BE HURTING...
BUT MY HEART FEELS EMPTY, LIKE IT'S BEEN ANESTHETIZED.
THERE HE GOES
...ALTHOUGH I WANT TO CRY...
...TO SCREAM...
I KNOW!
MAYBE I'LL COOK SOMETHING AND BRING IT TO HIM!
CHATTER
THEN SINCE TOMORROW IS A SUNDAY-
I'M SURE THEY DON'T WANT YOU INTRUDING
DON'T.
CHATTER
OF COURSE NOT!
IT'S YOSHIMI-SAN YOU'RE REALLY AFTER, ISN'T IT?
OH, BIG SISTER—
I WONDER WHAT EN-CHAN'S DOING RIGHT NOW?
=SIGH=

OH DEAR...
WHAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T KNOW?
ENJI WAS GOING TO MOVE OUT...
...FROM THE BEGINNING?
HE KNEW...
SOONER OR LATER, HE'D BE LEAVING THIS HOUSE..
SO THIS IS ENJI'S TRUE DECISION.
IN HIS HEART, HE'D ALREADY CHOSEN YOSHIMI-SAN OVER ALL ELSE.

"EARLIER"?
IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S GOING TO BE USING THEIR KITCHEN.
OH, REALLY NOW— SURELY SHE WON'T BE INTRUDING?
MAYBE THAT'S WHY EN-CHAN LEFT HERE SO MUCH EARLIER THAN SCHEDULED...
YOU'RE SO COLD, MIZUHO.
...BECAUSE I CAN'T GO MYSELF, EVEN THOUGH I WANT TO...
POKE
POKE
POKE
...IT'S THE JEALOUSY TALKING...
WHAT...?
WHY SO SURPRISED?
YOU KNEW FROM THE BEGINNING THAT EN-CHAN WAS GOING TO BE MOVING OUT EVENTUALLY, RIGHT?

wish.4 END

I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO GIVE HIM UP.

THAT EMBRACE—

I LOVE YOU.

THOSE WORDS—

THEY WERE ALL REALLY MEANT FOR YOSHIMI-SAN—

SO IT'S FINAL...

I WANTED YOU TO BE THE VERY FIRST PASSENGER.
WOW...
IT'S SO COOL...!
WERE YOU ON YOUR WAY SOMEWHERE?
NO, I WAS BORED SO I THOUGHT I'D GO RENT A VIDEO
SO, SHALL WE GO?
VROOM∞

YAWN...
SKREEK...
WOW! SO YOU FINALLY GOT IT?!
OH...
HELLO, YOUNG MAN.
CARE TO GO FOR A DRIVE?
OHHH YEAH...

I'VE BEEN HERE WITH ENJI BEFORE.
OH...
COME TO THINK OF IT...
RUSTLE
RUSTLE...
IT WAS SUMMER-
WE TOOK OUR BIKES OUT AT NIGHT...
I REMEMBER ENJI AND I JUST STARING WORDLESSLY UP AT THE SKY, MESMERIZED BY THE STARS
...TO THIS ONE RARE PLACE IN THE AREA WHERE THE STARS WERE CLEARLY VISIBLE.

LOOK AT ALL THE FAMILIES.
BUT COME NIGHTTIME, THIS PLACE FILLS UP WITH COUPLES, DOESN'T IT?
WHUMP
...AREN'T WE OUT OF PLACE HERE?
IT'S FINE. OH, LET'S SIT OVER THERE.
HURRGH
YOU'RE HEAVY!
I'M TIRED FROM ALL THE TENSION OF DRIVING A NEW CAR.
...
YUP, WE'RE DEFINITELY OUT OF PLACE HERE.
SPHEWS
LOLL
WHOA!

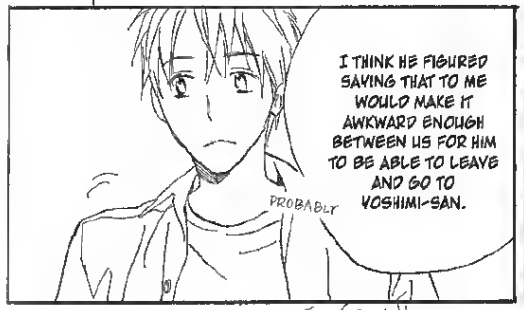
...I'M SURE ENJI DOESN'T WANT TO SEE ME, THOUGH.
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT.
ISSEI'S BEEN BUSY WORKING...
AND BESIDES, I HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN ABLE TO WORK THINGS OUT IN MY OWN MIND.
BUT YOU WANT TO SEE HIM, DON'T YOU?
THE PROOF IS IN THE FACT THAT HE'S GONE TO YOSHIMI-SAN.
I'M JUST THE THIRD WHEEL.
...
...
ENJI TOLD ME HE LOVED ME.
IT'D ALREADY BEEN DECIDED FROM THE START THAT HE'D BE LEAVING..
I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T KNOW.
ANY WORD FROM ENJI?
...NO.
I HAVEN'T TOLD ISSEI...
ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THREE WEEKS AGO, AFTER ENJI HAD "INTERRUPTED" US
I TOLD HIM ONLY THAT ENJI HAD GONE TO LIVE WITH YOSHIMI-SAN.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I WISH IT OR THINK ABOUT IT...
BUT...
THAT TIME WILL NEVER COME AGAIN.
IT'S FUTILE.

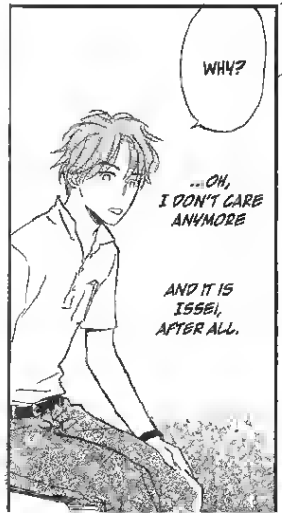
I DIDN'T WANT THAT.
...BEING JUMPED BY SOMEONE WHO ALREADY HAS A LOVER..
AND I WANT TO BE FREE OF THIS TRAPPED FEELING, ONCE AND FOR ALL...

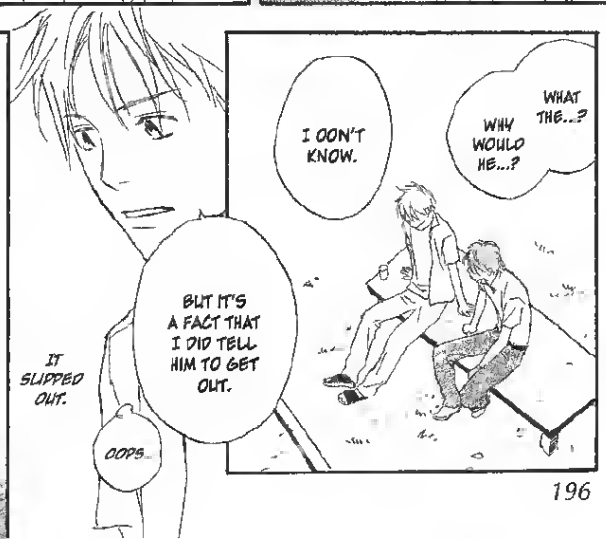
...MIZUHO.
THAT'S NOT THE POIN--
DON'T WORRY, NOTHING HAPPENED.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT ...?
...LIKE I TOLD YOU-- BECAUSE HE'S ALREADY GOT YOSHIMI-SAN.
HOW DOES THAT MAKE THINGS AWKWARD?
BEING TOLD, "I LOVE YOU," AND THEN BEING JUMPED..
HEY--

...WHAT?
THAT WAS...
...PROBABLY JUST HIS WAY OF GETTING A FINAL DIG IN AT ME.
YOU SURPRISED ME

WOOSH
...WHOA!

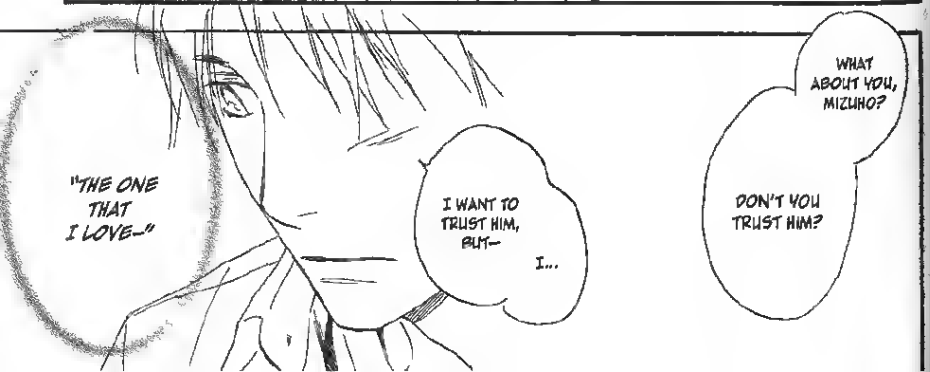

I THINK HE FIGURED SAYING THAT TO ME WOULD MAKE IT AWKWARD ENOUGH BETWEEN US FOR HIM TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE AND GO TO YOSHIMI-SAN.
PROBABLY


WHY?
...OH, I DON'T CARE ANYMORE
AND IT IS ISSEI, AFTER ALL.

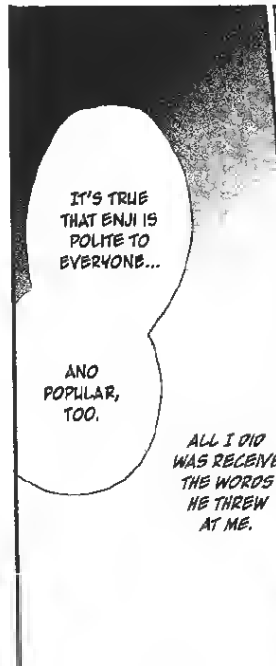

I DON'T KNOW.
WHY WOULD HE...?
WHAT THE..?
IT SLIPPED OUT.
BUT IT'S A FACT THAT I DID TELL HIM TO GET OUT.
OOPS.

COME TO THINK OF IT...
OH...
I MEAN, HE NEVER TOLD LILALA AND HIRO HIS CELL PHONE NUMBER...
OR ACCEPT THEIR MANY ADVANCES, YOU KNOW?
BUT I CAN'T SAY I'D DESCRIBE HIM AS A "PLAYER."

AT THE VERY LEAST, HE DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THE KIND OF GUY WHO WOULD SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT SO LIGHTLY, OR AS A PRANK.
THAT'S WHY I HAVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TRUST IN ENJI.


"THE ONE THAT I LOVE--"
I WANT TO TRUST HIM, BUT--
I...
DON'T YOU TRUST HIM?
WHAT ABOUT YOU, MIZUHO?

HUH...?
IS THAT THE KIND OF GUY YOU REALLY THINK HE IS, MIZUHO?
HIS WORDS TO ME WEREN'T HIS TRUE FEELINGS.
I SHOULD HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH THIS ALREADY...
BUT MY HEART HURTS JUST THE SAME.


IT'S TRUE THAT ENJI IS POLITE TO EVERYONE...
AND POPULAR, TOO.
ALL I DID WAS RECEIVE THE WORDS HE THREW AT ME.

...A PLAYER?
I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT THAT WAY.

ENJI--
DO YOU REALLY THINK OF HIM AS SUCH A PLAYER?

EVEN THE ONE LAST TIE WE HAVE AS COUSINS...

...I FEEL LIKE EVEN THAT CONNECTION WILL BE SEVERED.

...
...
GO SEE ENJI AND ASK HIM HOW HE REALLY FEELS.
THEN GO CONFIRM IT.
...YOU'RE SCARED, AREN'T YOU?
...THAT HE MAY TELL YOU IT WAS ALL JUST A JOKE?

"...IS YOU, MIZUHO."

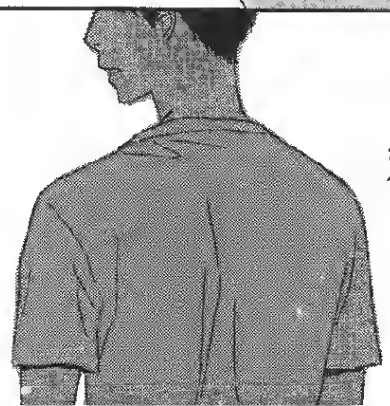
BUT IT JUST SEEMED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...

AND I DISMISSED THE POSSIBILITY FROM MY MIND.

IF HE WERE TO TELL ME DIRECTLY...

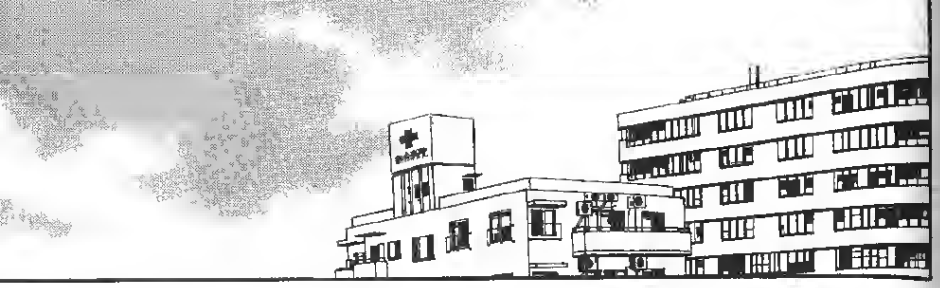
THAT IT WAS ALL A LIE...

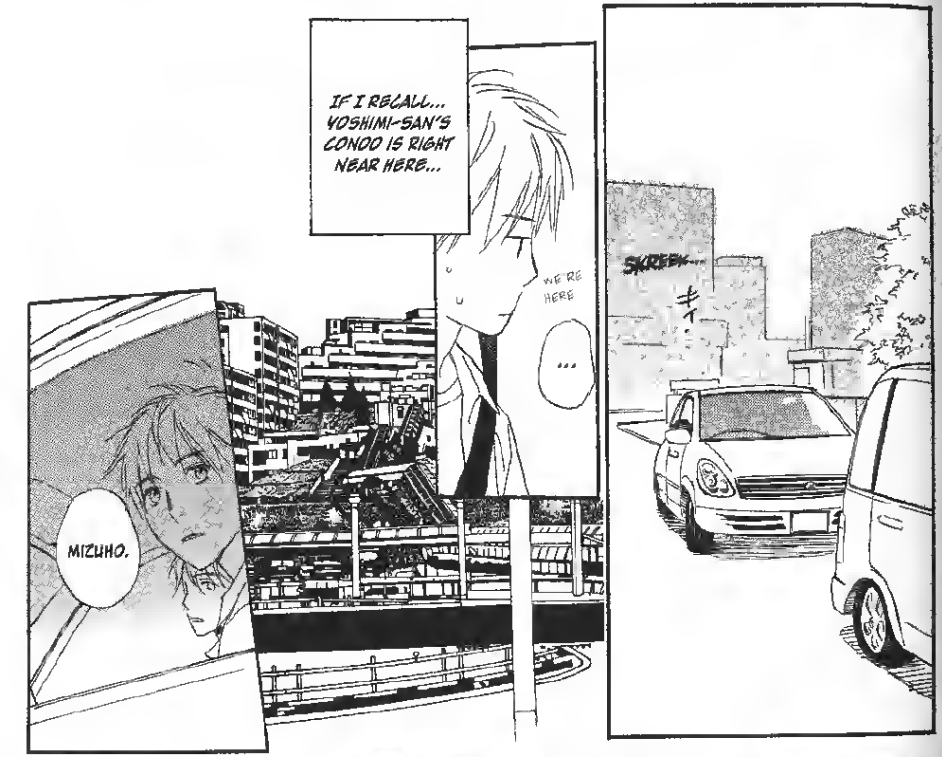
MY FEELINGS FOR HIM WOULD BE SHATTERED IRREPARABLY.

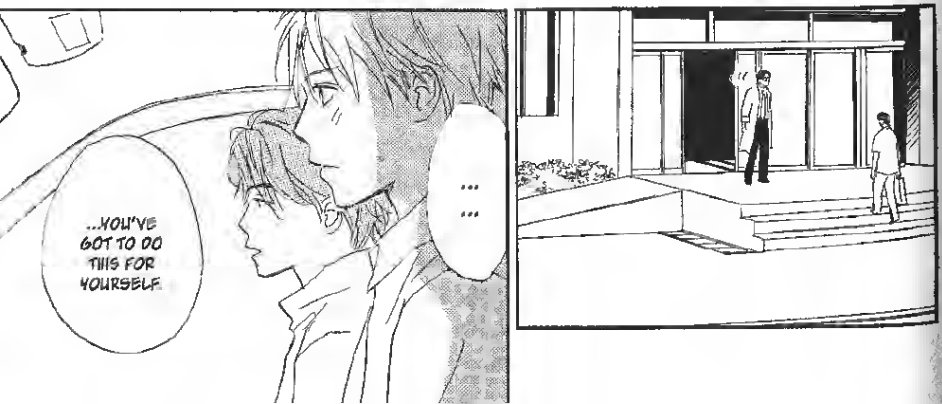


W... WHAT?!
NO WAY! HOW COULD I TELL YOSHIMI-SAN THAT?!
BRRRROOM
キュルルル
BESIDES, YOU'VE GOT TO TELL HIM DIRECTLY TO HIS FACE—
...THAT YOU LOVE ENJI.
ISSEI—
WE HAVE TO TELL HIM WE'RE GOING TO SEE ENJI, DON'T WE?
AFTER ALL, HE IS ENJI'S LANDLORD.
LET'S SEE THE HOSPITAL ADDRESS IS
YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY FOREVER.
BUT YOSHIMI-SAN HAS TOLD YOU HE LOVES ENJI, RIGHT?
IT ISN'T FAIR.
...

DR. YOSHIMI OF INTERNAL MEDICINE, PLEASE.
...HELLO?
WHAT THE...?!
ISSEI!
WHAT ABOUT YOSHIMI-SAN'S BUSINESS CARD OR SOMETHING?
OH...
Y...YEAH.
CLAK CLAK CLAK
YOINK
SHH, QUIET-
WHAT ARE YOU SPEAKING TO YOSHIMI-SAN FOR?!
YES, I KNOW THE PLACE
WE'LL SEE YOU THERE
JUST WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO TALK TO YOSHIMI-SAN ABOUT...?
WHAT...
WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO MEET NOW?
WE WON'T TAKE UP MUCH OF YOUR TIME.
...I'M SORRY TO BOTHER YOU AT WORK.
MY NAME IS YOSHIMURA— I'M A FRIEND OF MIZUHO ODAJIMA.







THE MEANING BEHIND HIS KISS—

THE REAL MEANING BEHIND THE WORDS "I LOVE YOU"— I WANT TO KNOW...

BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO ASK HIM BECAUSE...

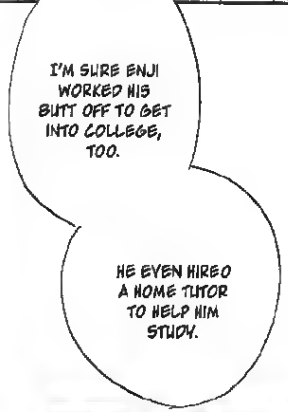
I LACK THE COURAGE TO TAKE THAT FIRST STEP.
...HOW COULD ANYONE LOVE A SPINELESS COWARD LIKE ME?
I KNOW I'M WEAK.
OH BOY.
OHHHHH...
THONK
...I KNOW, BUT...

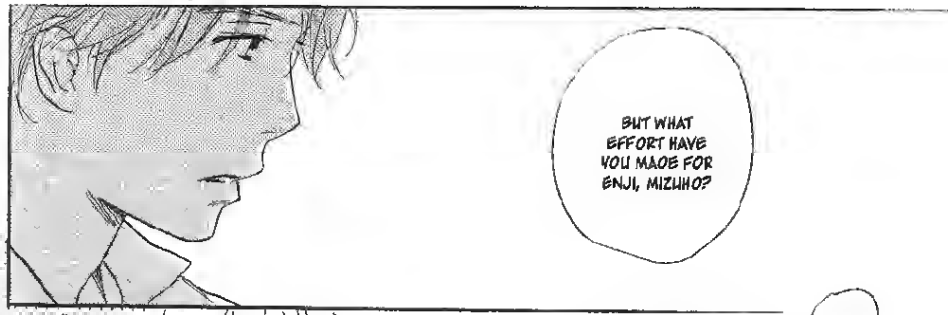
I GAVE UP...
TELLING MYSELF THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO—
HOW CAN I EXPECT...
TO GET WHAT I WANT WHEN I'M SO PASSIVE?
IS WHAT I WANT SO TRIVIAL THAT IT REQUIRES NO EFFORT?
...LET'S GO.

I HAVEN'T DONE ONE SINGLE THING.
ALL I'VE DONE IS GO ALONG WITH THE SITUATION.

HMM
WELL, I GUESS THAT'S NOT AN EXACT COMPARISON, BUT...

EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS LIKE THAT.
FOR EXAMPLE, IN ORDER TO GET THIS CAR, I WORKED MY BUTT OFF.


I'M SURE ENJI WORKED HIS BUTT OFF TO GET INTO COLLEGE, TOO.
HE EVEN HIRED A HOME TUTOR TO HELP HIM STUDY.


BUT WHAT EFFORT HAVE YOU MADE FOR ENJI, MIZUHO?

...HUH?
EFFORT...?

FOR ENJI—
TO BE ABLE TO STAY WITH ENJI...

I...
FOR THESE FEELINGS...
I'LL DO WHAT I CAN.
FOR ENJI—
.. I WANT TO SEE ENJI.
I WANT TO SEE ENJI AND TALK WITH HIM.
MAY I GO TO YOUR CONDO?

WHAT I REALLY WANT IS—
WHAT I WANT—
WHUMP
ARE YOU YOSHIMI-SAN?
No NO
I WAS PRETTY MUCH DONE FOR THE DAY—
..SINCE IT'S A SATURDAY.
THANK YOU FOR SEEING US WHEN YOU'RE SO BUSY

"WHAT EFFORT HAVE YOU MADE FOR ENJI?"
GLANCE

HELLO, MIZUHO-KUN.
BEEN WELL?
OH.. YES.

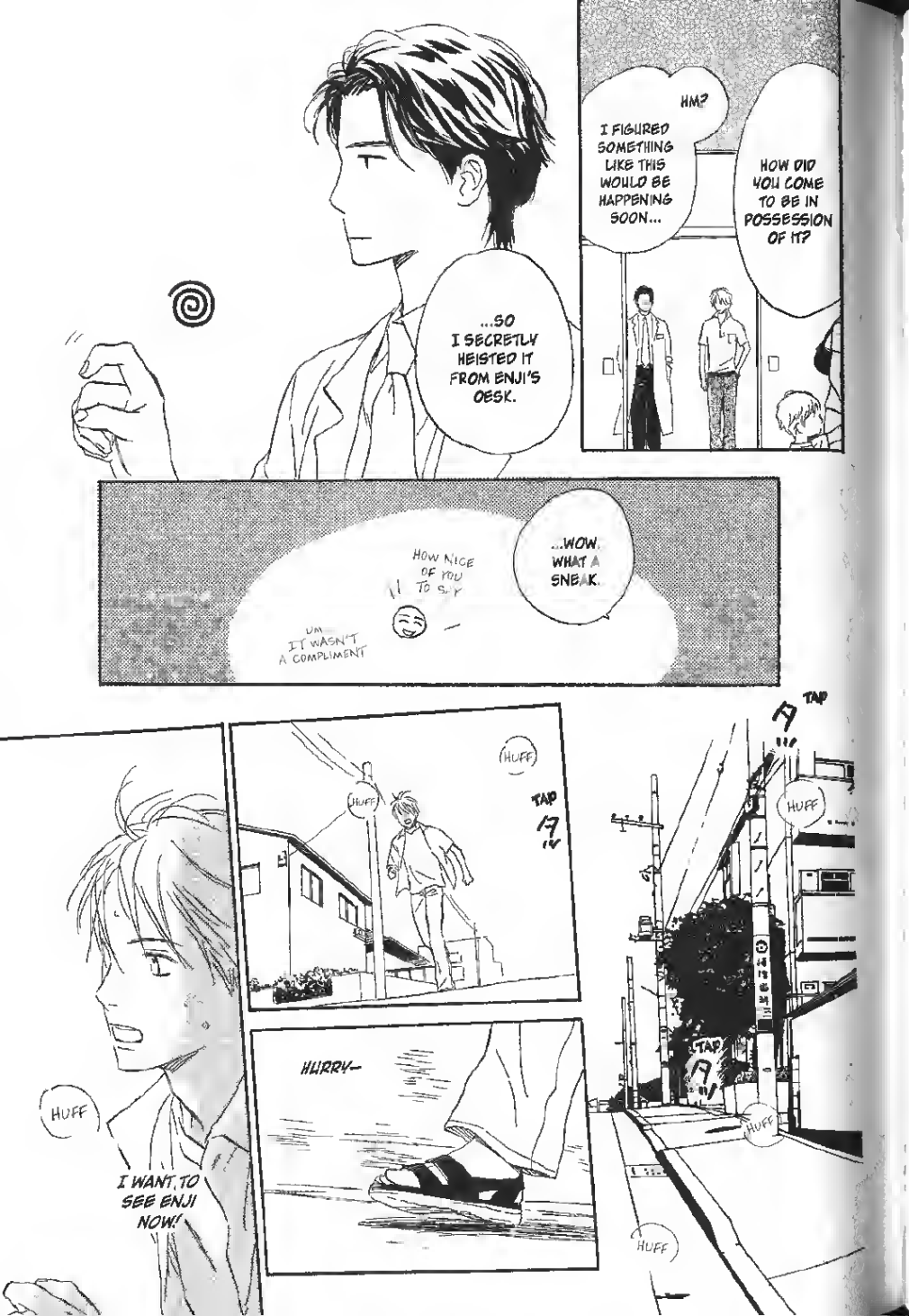
...I KNOW IT'S IDIOTIC OF ME TO ASK SOMETHING LIKE THIS OF YOU...
BUT...
PLEASE LET ME SEE HIM.
I BEG YOU.
COME ON NOW—
MIZUHO-KUN...
I'VE FINALLY REALIZED THAT ENJI IS THE ONLY ONE FOR ME.
I FEEL NO SHAME OR EMBARRASSMENT.
...EVEN IF ENJI'S HEART BELONGS TO YOU.

I'LL NEVER OBTAIN WHAT I WANT THAT WAY.
IT'S TRUE THAT IT'S EASIER TO SIT AND WALLOW IN MY OWN SELF-PITY, BUT...
I'M GOING TO TELL HIM I LOVE HIM.
WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO WHEN YOU SEE HIM?
EVEN ONE STEP. .
NO MATTER HOW SMALL—
I'VE GOT TO TAKE IT WITH MY OWN FEET, OR IT'S MEANINGLESS.
EVEN IF ENJI DOESN'T RETURN MY FEELINGS—
EVEN IF HE REJECTS ME—
I STILL WANT TO TELL HIM
...SO IN OTHER WORDS, YOU'RE DECLARING YOURSELF MY RIVAL?

THIS COLORED PAPER... I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE.
OH—
TAKE A LOOK AT IT.
SO HERE.
DON'T TOUCH IT!
THAT TIME—
IT WAS IN THAT BOX...
...THIS—
CRINKLE
IF, AFTER READING THAT, YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND—
THEN I'LL GLADLY KEEP ENJI FOR MYSELF.
...YOU'VE GOT ME.
IF YOU'RE WILLING TO GO THIS FAR, HOW CAN I PLAY THE VILLAIN ANY LONGER?
...MIZUHO.
THIS IS WHAT I DESERVE FOR NOT HAVING DONE WHAT I SHOULD HAVE UNTIL NOW.
BY THE WAY, MIZUHO-KUN...
RUMMAGE
YOU DON'T SEEM TO COMPREHEND WHO IT IS ENJI HAS TRUE FEELINGS FOR—
HERE'S THE PASS CODE AND THE KEY
ENJI SHOULD BE HOME RIGHT NOW.
SCRIBBLE

STAND
WHOA-
DASH!
OH MAN...
THERE HE GOES...
NO CHILD EVER REGARDS HIS PARENTS AS HE'S LEAVING THE NEST.
JEEZ
HE DIDN'T EVEN LOOK BACK ONCE.
THAT'S THE WAY IT IS.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.
YES, I GUESSED IT.
CORRECTLY, TOO, IT SEEMS.
UM-
ME AND MIZUHO'S RELATIONSHIP... DID YOU...?
...HUH?
HE SURE GOT STRONG ALL AT ONCE...

DON'T YOU THINK HE'D HAVE GOTTEN RID OF IT BY NOW IF HE WERE REALLY GOING OUT WITH ME?
...
...
ENJI HAS KEPT IT ALL THIS TIME.
YOU SEE, ENJI'S BEEN WORRYING THIS WHOLE TIME THAT I'M GOING TO SAY SOMETHING TO CAUSE A MISUNDERSTANDING.
I GATHER THAT'S WHY HE DIDN'T WANT TO INTRODUCE ME TO YOU.
YOU SEE, I ALSO HAPPEN TO BE ENJI'S PERSONAL PHYSICIAN.
OH, AND...
ABOUT THAT COMMENT I MADE, IMPLYING I'M USED TO SEEING HIM NAKED...?
NAKED?
...YOU GET IT NOW, RIGHT?


...SO I SECRETLY HEISTED IT FROM ENJI'S DESK.
HM?
I FIGURED SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD BE HAPPENING SOON...
HOW DID YOU COME TO BE IN POSSESSION OF IT?
...WOW. WHAT A SNEAK.
HOW NICE OF YOU TO SAY
UM... IT WASN'T A COMPLIMENT
HUFF
TAP
HURRY—
I WANT TO SEE ENJI NOW!

ALTHOUGH ENJI SEEMS TO HAVE A MISCONCEPTION ABOUT YOU TWO...
AN ANNOYINGLY CLOSE FRIENDSHIP, OR SOMETHING TO THAT EFFECT... RIGHT?
I MEAN, I SENSED ABSOLUTELY NOTHING SEXUAL BETWEEN YOU AND MIZUHO-KUN AT ALL.
IF YOU KNEW, COULDN'T YOU HAVE EXPLAINED...?
—MEH, I SUPPOSE THAT WOULD HAVE MADE THINGS TOO EASY FOR YOU.
HA HA HA
WELL, THAT'S ONE LESS SOURCE OF ENTERTAINMENT FOR ME.
IT'S REGRETFUL— PLAYING THE PART OF ENJI'S LOVER WAS SUCH A PLUM ROLE.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DIDN'T JUST WANT TO STIR THINGS UP?
SURE.
YOSHIMURA-KUN, RIGHT? WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO FOR A DRINK WITH ME TONIGHT?
IT'S PROBABLY BEST I DON'T RETURN HOME TODAY ANYWAY.
HAHA HAHA
...BY THE WAY— THAT LETTER..

SEE YOU AGAIN IN WINTER
OKAY
AND HANDED IT TO HIM BEFORE I LEFT.
THAT I WROTE A LETTER..
OH? WHAT'S THAT?
DON'T LOOK!
ENJI WAS SO CUTE AND DEAR TO ME...
DEAR ENJI,
WHEN WE GROW UP, LETS LIVE TOGETHER. THEN WE'LL LOOK AT THE STARS EVERY NIGHT. I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU, ENJI. FOREVER AND EVER.
MIZUHO
I'VE FINALLY REMEMBERED
TAP
MY UNCLE HELPED ME WITH IT
BUT I PAINTED IT MYSELF
IS ONE THAT I MADE.
THAT WOODEN BOX WHICH CONTAINED THE LETTER..

I WANT TO SEE HIM
NOT TALK TO HIM.
ENJI, WHO WAS ALWAYS SO OBEDIENT...
"I CAN'T. MY DAD'S GOT TO GO BACK TO WORK."
...WOULD ALWAYS WHINE WHEN IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO GO HOME.
"MIZU-CHAN."
"MIZU-CHAN..."
PLEASE DON'T GO YET."
"STAY ONE MORE DAY."
I WANTED TO STAY LONGER, TOO.
...AND MANAGED TO KEEP MY FEELINGS IN CHECK.
WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN IN THE WINTER
BUT EVEN AS A CHILD, I HAD THIS FUNNY PRIDE TO MAINTAIN AS THE OLDER ONE...

602
DING DONG
KCHAK
OH, WELCOME HOME.
YOU'RE EARLY—
...WHAT'S HAPPENED?
KTHUNK...
IT'S ONLY BEEN A SHORT TIME SINCE I LAST SAW HIM...
...I WANT TO TALK TO YOU.

WHO'S HOLDING UP THE ELEVATOR?!
DASH
IT IRKS ME TO THINK
HOW COULD I HAVE FORGOTTEN?
ENJI KEPT MY LETTER PRECIOUS FOR ALL THIS TIME...
ENJI...
THERE'S NO STRONGER PROOF THAN THAT.
THEY WEREN'T LIES.
I KNOW THAT NOW.
HIS CONFESSION—
HIS KISS—
LOVES ME—

...THAT'S RIGHT
I WAS JUST KIDDING.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING OUT WITH YOSHIMI-SAN, SO...
...WHEN YOU SAID YOU LOVED ME, I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST KIDDING AROUND.
IF I HAD HEARD IT ANY TIME BEFORE THIS...
HIS GRUMPY RESPONSE WOULD HAVE MADE ME FALTER.
I WANT HIM TO NOD.
ENJI...
YOU LOVE ME, DON'T YOU?
EVEN NOW... I'M STILL A LITTLE SCARED.
YOU'RE LYING.
IT WASN'T A JOKE, WAS IT?
BUT...
...WELL, COME IN.
BUT I FEEL LIKE I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN YEARS.
CLAK
I'M SORRY...
...FOR NOT TRUSTING YOU.
SO WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

.. I KNEW I COULDN'T FIND IT—
SO IT WAS YOSHIMI-SAN, HUH?
...!
...THIS—
I LOVE YOU
CLATTER
I LOVE YOU, TOO.
I LOVE YOU, ENJI
I'VE LOVED YOU EVER SINCE WE WERE KIDS.
...THAT'S RIGHT.
...SO WHAT IF I DO?
I WANT TO HEAR HIM SAY...
IT'S TRUE.
NO.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME—
BUT YOU'RE GONNA TELL ME TO GIVE YOU UP BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THAT YOSHIMURA GUY, RIGHT?

YEAH
...I LOVE YOU.
THAT LAST SUMMER YOU CAME OVER, MIZUHO...
THE TIME YOU FELL OUT OF THE TREE.
I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "FROM NOW ON, IT'S MY TURN TO PROTECT MIZUHO."
ENJI'S HEARTBEAT—
HIS BREATH—
ENJI'S WARMTH—
THAT'S WHY I WAS RUNNING FROM YOU.
I'D BEEN AVOIDING YOU BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
AND I FELT AWKWARD.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THAT YOSHIMURA GUY ..?
...
BUT THE WHOLE TIME, I'VE WANTED US TO BE LIKE WE WERE IN THE PAST.
...AND NOW, I WANT US TO BE EVEN MORE THAN THAT.
THAT'S NOT THE POINT.
..UMM—
BUT ENJI'S A GUY, TOO...
.. HUH?
AND BESIDES, WE'RE BOTH GUYS—
THAT'S A MISUNDER-STANDING!
ISSEI IS A GOOD FRIEND, BUT HE'S NOT MY LOVER!
WHAT I'M SAYING IS U
IT'S NOT ABOUT MALE OR FEMALE—
WHAT MATTERS IS THAT IT'S ENJI

CREAK
キシ…
EVERYWHERE WE TOUCH…
A SLOW WARMTH ARISES…
…MM…
ME…
ENJI…
BOTH OF US, IN THE SAME WAY—
…MIZUHO.
OH…
WHOA!
T…
LICK

…HEY…
YOUR HEARTBEAT…
DOES IT RACE THIS MUCH WHEN YOSHIMURA HUGS YOU, TOO?
O…OF COURSE NOT!
THEY MAKE MY PULSE RACE.
I LOVE HIM…
IT'S RACING BECAUSE IT'S YOU, ENJI…!
…OKAY.
IS SO KIND…
WARM…
ENJI'S SMILE.
IT MAKES ME WANT TO CRY—
AND NOSTALGIC…

SQUEEZE
...ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE ME WAIT EVEN LONGER?
IT'S JUST...
IT'S NOT THAT...BUT...
MIZUHO...
HUG
...
...
...NERVOUS?
URK
IT'S MY FIRST TIME, TOO.
THIS IS MY FIRST TIME, YOU KNOW...
WELL, EXCUSE ME!
...
...
HA HA
YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS.
IT'S ALWAYS "TIME OUT" WHEN YOU'RE SCARED.

TH...THIS...
IT'S SO EROTIC...
..N...
NOT HERE...
THERE'S NO TELLING WHEN YOSHIMI-SAN MAY COME HOME...
...
TIME OUT!
WHOMP
KOFF
WH WHOA
HE'S NOT THAT INSENSITIVE.
UM, BUT...
OH—
I HAVEN'T EVEN TAKEN A BATH...
I RAN OVER SO I'M ALL SWEATY
SLIDE
SLIDE
WHA...?!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, DUMMY?!
YOU WANNA TAKE ONE TOGETHER?
I DON'T MIND IF WE DO IT IN THE BATH...

...!
MIZUHO...
HUFF
NN...!
UHN
W-
WHOA.
OH-
MIZUHO-

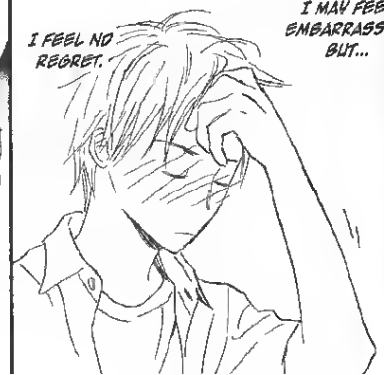
IT'S TRUE.
..NO WAY.
I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT WITH ANYONE ELSE BUT YOU, MIZUHO.
I THOUGHT FOR SURE YOU'D HAVE DONE 5 OR 10 WOMEN
SO...
NO MORE TIME OUTS, OKAY?
I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS ANYMORE.

FLINCH
YIKES...?
I'M ..
SORRY...
UH...
ENJI...NOT THERE ..
THA...
OH-
...IT'S OKAY.
I CAN'T HOLD MYSELF BACK...
UNHH!
IF IT'S ENJI—
MAKE ME YOURS, ENJI.
I CAN FORGIVE HIM FOR ANYTHING.
...
CAN YOU..
...TOUCH MINE, TOO?
DFWAH
HUFF
PLEASE...?
ENJI...
HUFF
ENJI, WHO'S ALWAYS SO COOL AND COLLECTED..
M—
MM...
!..SEEMS SO DESPERATE RIGHT NOW!
?
SLIDE
...UNH...
HAA...
H...
OKAY...

IF I RELY ON HIM EVEN A LITTLE BIT RIGHT NOW—
I'M GOING TO REMEMBER WHAT WE WERE JUST DOING..
IM FINE. IT'S NOTHING...
ARE YOU OKAY? WANT ME TO PIGGYBACK YOU AFTER ALL?
PLOD
PLOD

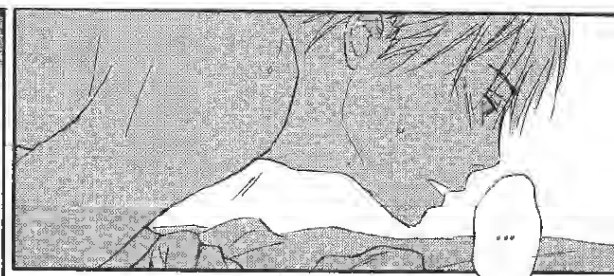
YOU SURE YOU DON'T NEED HELP?
YES!
AAARGH!
...DONE THINGS LIKE THIS... AND THAT... OH...!
I CAN'T BELIEVE I SAID THINGS I'D NEVER SAY IN MY SANE MOMENTS...

I'LL LET GO IF I SEE SOMEONE COMING
HEY, WHAT IF SOMEONE SEES...?


I FEEL NO REGRET.
I MAY FEEL EMBARRASSED, BUT...

CREAK

EN...
W...
WAIT...
MIZUHO...


...

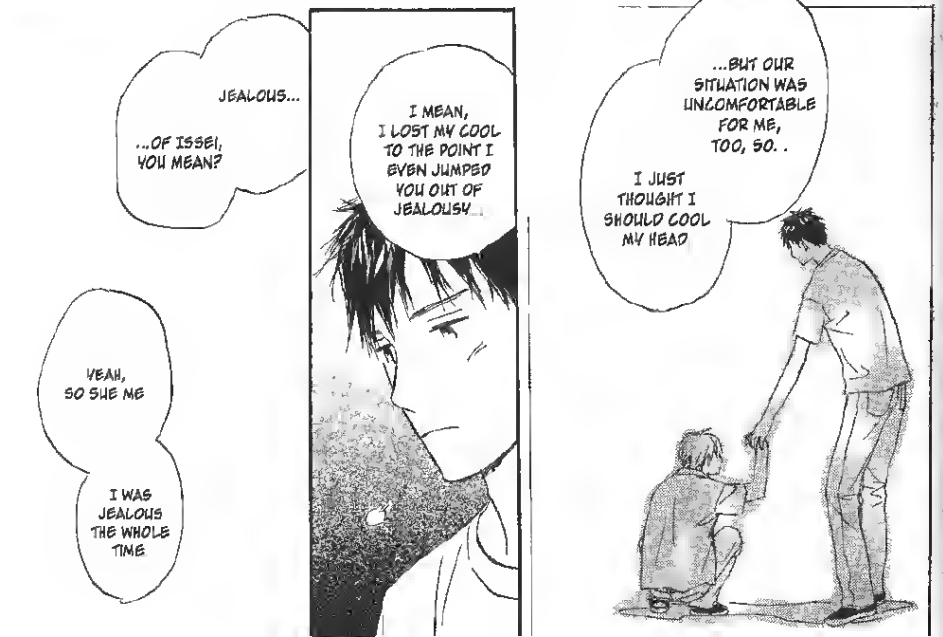
...!
..OH—

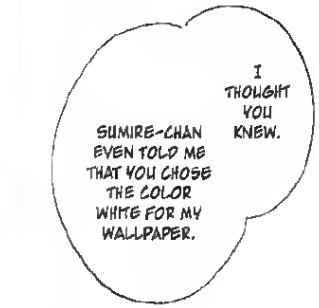
ENJI...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN..?
HUH?
JOLT
...YOU MEAN YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW?
DON'T TELL ME THERE'S SOME OTHER REASON HE CAN'T...?
I MEAN, I KNOW YOSHIMI-SAN'S PLACE IS MORE LUXURIOUS...
AND PROBABLY EASIER TO LIVE IN...
BUT...
...HOLD ON.
CONSTRUCTION'S STARTING AT THE END OF THE MONTH.
THAT'S WHY, DURING THAT TIME, I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE STAYING WITH YOSHIMI-SAN.
...HUH?
THEY'RE GOING TO FIX UP MY ROOM.
SIGH
HUH? IT'S NOT JUST BECAUSE OF ME? SO YOU'RE NEVER COMING BACK?

BUT NOW WE SHARE AN EVEN STRONGER BOND—
STRONGER THAN THE ONE WE HAD BEFORE.
...JUST LIKE WE USED TO.
WALKING WITH ENJI UNDER A CANOPY OF TWINKLING STARS...
...YOU SHOULD COME STAY OVER AT THE HOUSE.
HUH?
...BUT YOU'LL COME BACK... RIGHT?
NO
I DON'T THINK I COULD LOOK AUNTIE IN THE FACE RIGHT NOW...
I SUPPOSE NOT!
...
...
OH WELL... I SUPPOSE IT'S ALRIGHT...

WHAT WAS ALL MY ANGUISH FOR...?!
AHA HA
SORRY.
NOPE.
THEN..
YOU WEREN'T PLANNING ON MOVING OUT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING..?


JEALOUS...
...OF ISSEI, YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, I LOST MY COOL TO THE POINT I EVEN JUMPED YOU OUT OF JEALOUSY...
YEAH, SO SUE ME
I WAS JEALOUS THE WHOLE TIME
...BUT OUR SITUATION WAS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR ME, TOO, SO..
I JUST THOUGHT I SHOULD COOL MY HEAD

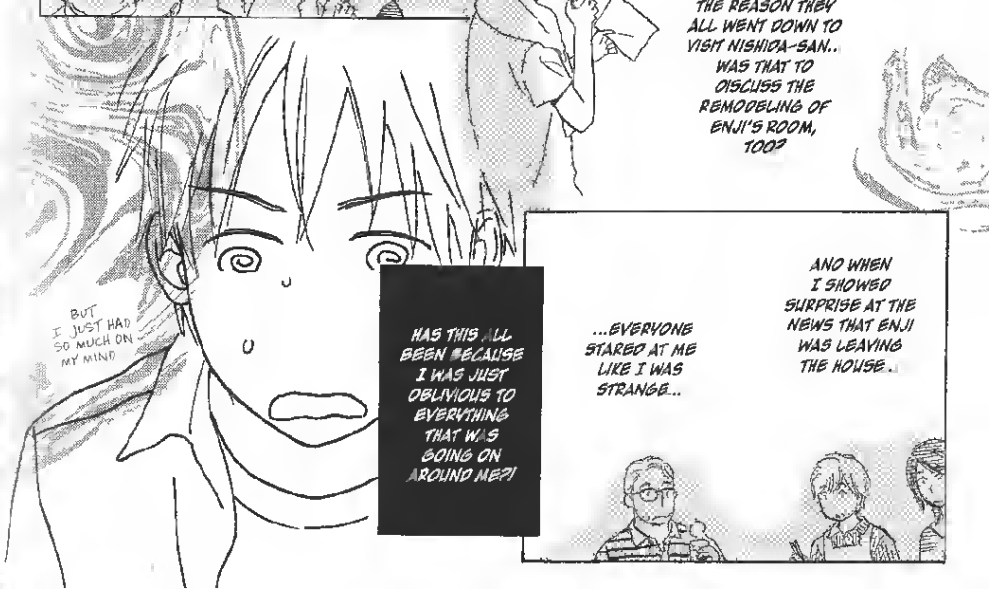

I THOUGHT YOU KNEW.
SUMIRE-CHAN EVEN TOLD ME THAT YOU CHOSE THE COLOR WHITE FOR MY WALLPAPER.

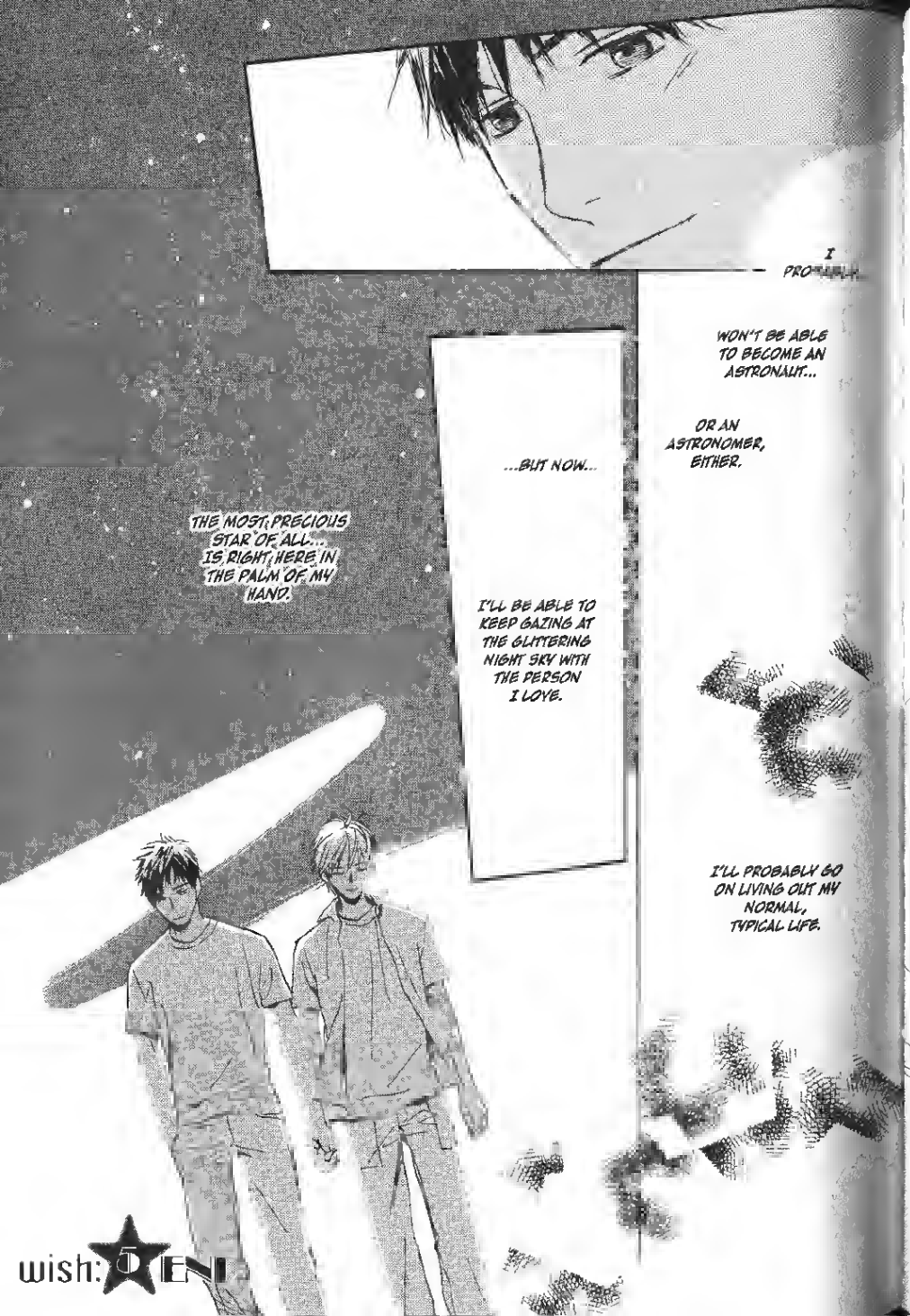
...BUT THEN YOU TOLD ME TO GET OUT.

WHAT'S THAT?!

WH...
SO I LEFT A LITTLE EARLIER THAN SCHEDULED.

HUH...?!
...OH!
THAT TIME... COME TO THINK OF IT, THEY WERE LOOKING AT CATALOGS FOR INTERIORS AND FURNITURE


SO... THE REASON THEY ALL WENT DOWN TO VISIT NISHIDA-SAN.. WAS THAT TO DISCUSS THE REMODELING OF ENJI'S ROOM, TOO?
BUT I JUST HAD SO MUCH ON MY MIND
HAS THIS ALL BEEN BECAUSE I WAS JUST OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON AROUND ME?!
...EVERYONE STARED AT ME LIKE I WAS STRANGE...
AND WHEN I SHOWED SURPRISE AT THE NEWS THAT ENJI WAS LEAVING THE HOUSE..


I PROBABLY
WON'T BE ABLE TO BECOME AN ASTRONAUT...
OR AN ASTRONOMER, EITHER.
...BUT NOW...
THE MOST PRECIOUS STAR OF ALL... IS RIGHT HERE IN THE PALM OF MY HAND.
I'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP GAZING AT THE GLITTERING NIGHT SKY WITH THE PERSON I LOVE.
I'LL PROBABLY GO ON LIVING OUT MY NORMAL, TYPICAL LIFE.

ENJI... JEALOUS...

I HOPE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO FLIRT LIKE THAT WITH HIM ANYMORE.

SQUEEZE
AND THEN--
.. LET'S LOOK AT THE STARS TOGETHER, OKAY?

...
...
COME BACK.
YOU CAN STAY IN MY ROOM.

CONSTELLATIONS IN MY PALM

TOUSO 星座

Afterword

HELLO. THIS IS CHISAKO SAKURAGI,
THE WRITER OF THIS STORY.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THIS BOOK IN HAND.

EVER SINCE I WAS A CHILD, I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MANGA AND DREAMT OF ONE DAY BECOMING A MANGA ARTIST MYSELF. AS HOPELESS AS THIS DREAM WAS FOR ME, WITH THIS PROJECT I FEEL AS IF MY WISH HAS BEEN PARTIALLY FULFILLED, AND FOR THIS I AM VERY HAPPY.

BECAUSE I WROTE THIS STORY WHOLLY ACCORDING TO MY OWN TASTES, I AM SURE IT MUST HAVE BEEN VERY TRYING AT TIMES FOR HONAMI-SAN AND EDITOR MITSUHIRO-SAN.. BUT I AM IN AWE AT HONAMI-SAN, WHO MANAGED TO MAKE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL MANGA OUT OF IT!
HONAMI-SAN, THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH
I WAS ALWAYS EXCITED TO SEE HONAMI-SAN'S RENDITIONS OF MIZUHO AND ENJI, A THOUSAND TIMES MORE FULL OF LIFE THAN IN MY WRITING.
I WENT SERIOUSLY HEAD OVER HEELS FOR YOSHIMI (LAUGH)

I AM TRULY GRATEFUL TO HAVE BEEN SO BLESSED.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

CHISAKO SAKURAGI

Constellations In My Palm

It's been 8 years since Mizuho Odaima foolishly cut off all ties with his childhood friend, Enji Ikezoe. So he's in for quite a shocker when Enji, now a mature and responsible astronomy student, comes to live with the Odaima family while he attends university. Despite having feelings for Enji, Mizuho, a defeatist at heart, takes no steps to patch things up with him. But when a handsome rival comes to steal Enji away forever, will Mizuho be able to muster up the strength to set things right and tell Enji his true feelings? Or will he simply do what he does best in the face of adversity: acknowledge his limitations, and give up on Enji, the brightest star of all?

What would you do if you lost the best thing that happened to me because of your own pride and selfishness? Constellations in My Palm is a story of maturity and humility, teaching us that these are necessary components of true love and friendship. After all, if you never try or put any effort into life, is it a surprise if it simply flows on by, leaving you unsatisfied and empty?

ISBN-10 1-56970-798-7
ISBN-13 978-1-56970-798-2
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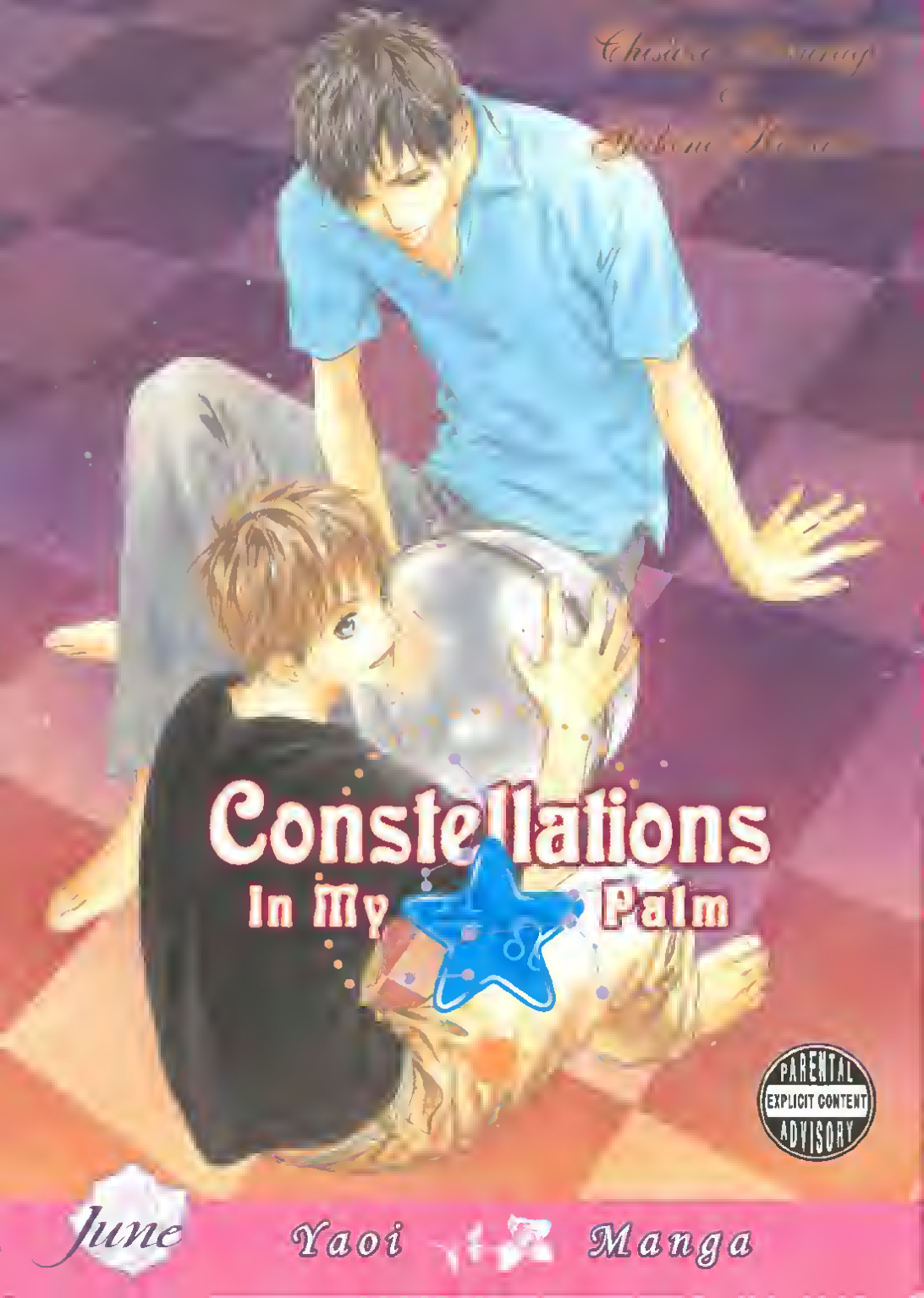
M FOR MATURE AUDIENCES 18+

NATIVE MANGA
READ RIGHT TO LEFT

June by DMP


Constellations
In My Palm
PARENTAL
EXPLICIT CONTENT
ADVISORY
June
Yaoi
Manga